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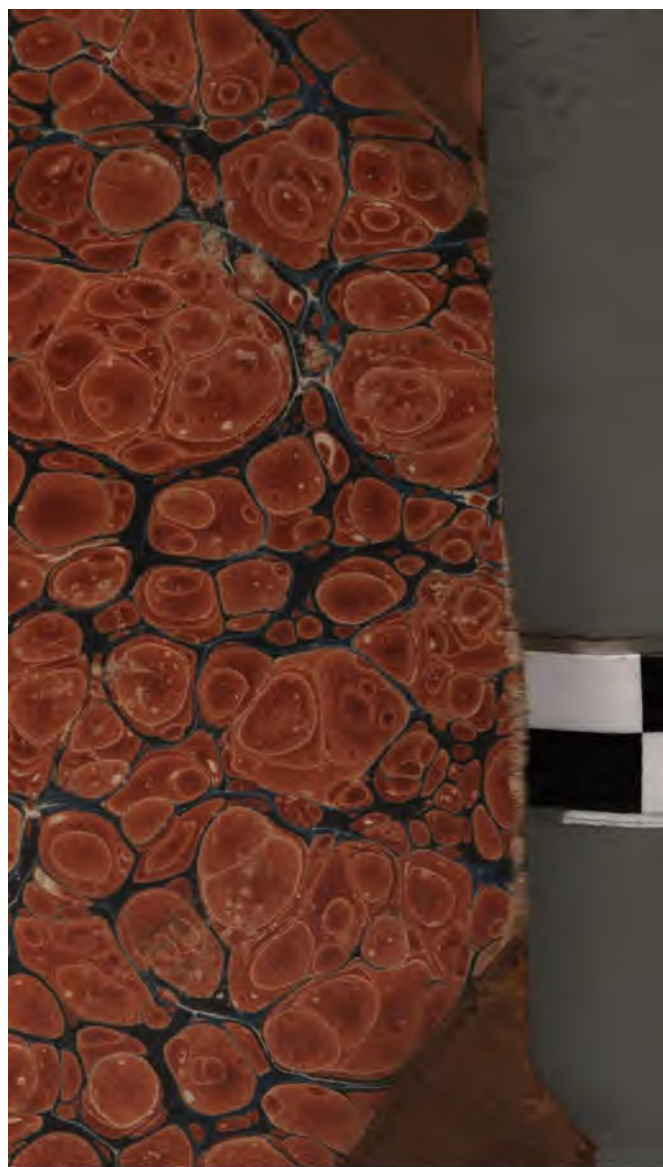
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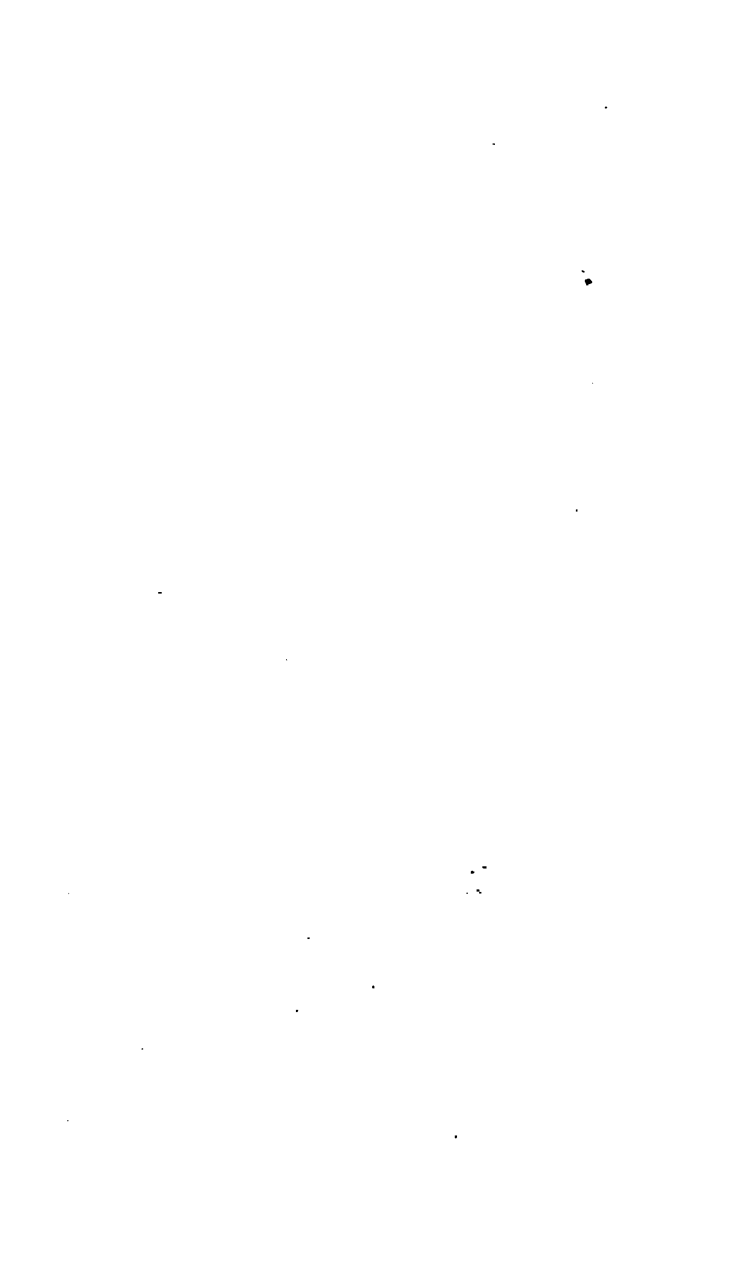


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NATURE OF THE PROOF

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION:

WITH

A STATEMENT OF

THE PARTICULAR EVIDENCE FOR IT.

DESIGNED FOR THE USE OF

THE MORE EDUCATED CLASSES OF INQUIRERS

INTO RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

Let men, therefore, reproach us no more with want of perfect light; for we profess ourselves to want it. But let them discern the truth of religion in its very obscurity,—in that mixture of darkness which surrounds us, and that indiffidence which we find in ourselves to the knowledge of it.—PASCAL.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

SHOULD ever any subsequent Edition of this little Work be required, the compiler will rejoice to avail himself of any hints which may be suggested to him, calculated to render it more extensively useful.

He is well aware how unequal, in many respects, he is to what has been undertaken; but since throughout the whole he is continually speaking in the words of other and more able persons, he trusts that whatever imperfections may characterise his share of the undertaking, will yet not defeat his sincerely good intentions.



INTRODUCTION.

THE present Publication, originated, in the Compiler's own, very painful, experience ; and, in what he has observed, in numerous others, similarly situated with himself.

At a time when, from various circumstances, after a considerable portion of his life spent in other and very engrossing pursuits, he became desirous to ascertain, for himself, the merits of that Religious profession which he had been taught in childhood to believe, implicitly—he candidly avows, that he found the subject involved in so much seeming embarrassment, that he several times altogether abandoned it. The books recommended, to convince him, failed to produce any satisfactory conviction on his mind ; and for this apparent reason—because,

though there did seem to him to exist a considerable body of historic evidence, and other proof, there yet appeared to lie so many objections to, and so many imperfections in, that proof, that he thought, until the question could be cleared of these, it was a hopeless case for him to be called on "to believe."

Since, however, he has, notwithstanding all such then apparently insurmountable difficulties, now arrived at, a permanent and increasing conviction, that Christianity is a matter which he may safely credit and act on, he is daily pained at witnessing, in numerous others, precisely the same apprehensions which once so much disturbed himself; and he thinks that he perceives even an increasing degree of such misconceptions amongst the thoughtful and studious of the present day. He every day meets with men, not only willing, but anxious to be convinced on these, if true, confessedly important subjects, yet unable to throw off the incubus which oppresses them, in the apparent *insufficiency of the proof* usually adduced as the proper grounds for their assent to Revelation.

For the aid of such really sincere inquirers,

he has arranged the following considerations; which will, if he mistakes not, (perused with that attention which the peculiarity of the case requires), as abundantly remove from their minds, as they did from his, their remaining difficulties, and free them, from that most displeasing of all situations, which makes us to differ, and that not lightly, but conscientiously and unavoidably, from many around us, with whom we heartily wish we *could* agree; as well as, from the conclusions of such multitudes of the wisest and the best in every age.

The object, then, of the main body of this little work, is, as its title indicates,—first, to clear away all impediments, arising out of the *peculiar KIND OR NATURE of the proof on religious questions in general*, and of *Christianity in particular*; and, afterwards, *to enter on a clear and lucid statement of the positive evidence itself*—of the various facts and grounds on which our assent to the obligations of Christianity are demanded.

This *previous* statement of the *kind or nature* of the Christian evidence, is, I apprehend, the proper introduction, for studious men especially, to the particular evidence itself.

Misconceptions as to the *nature* of the evidence, of which alone such a revelation as the Christian is susceptible, are at the bottom of no inconsiderable portion of the doubts of our modern inquirers. Mr. Locke, with his usual discrimination, has referred to this, in a passage which I here gladly transcribe from Lord King's recent Life and Correspondence of that truly great and sagacious man :—

“ For the shortening of our pains and keeping us from incurable doubt and perplexity of mind, and endless inquiry after *greater certainty than is to be had*, it would be very convenient, in the several parts that are to be known and studied, to consider *what proofs the matter in hand is capable of*, and not to expect *other* kinds of evidence than the *nature of the thing will bear*.

“ Where it hath all the proofs that such a matter is capable of, there we ought to acquiesce, and receive it as an established and demonstrated truth; for that which hath all the evidence it *can have*,—all that *belongs* to it in the common state of things—and that, supposing it to be as true as any thing ever was,—yet you cannot

possibly contrive nor imagine how to have better proofs of it *without a miracle*; whatsoever is so, though *there may be some doubts*, some obscurity, yet it is clear enough to determine our thoughts, and fix our assent.

“The want of this caution, I fear, has been the cause why some men have turned sceptics in points of great importance, which yet have all the proofs that, considering the nature and circumstances of the things, any rational man can demand, or the most cautious fancy.”—Study; p. 106, 1st edition.

The foregoing extract, while it in part anticipates the main introductory argument of the subsequent pages, and while it suggests a weighty admonition to inquirers into subjects of this nature, most strongly enforces the idea which led to it, that a consideration of the particular evidence to be adduced in support of what is affirmed to be a revelation from the Almighty, is fitly preceded by an account of *“what proofs the matter in hand is capable of.”*

This is *first* done in what is here laid before the thoughtful portion of the community; and *then* follows, in its just and appropriate order,

a statement of those various facts and probabilities, upon which our assent to Christianity is demanded.

The student of Butler will perceive, that for this purpose the two celebrated chapters of that great man, on these points, have been here made use of. They are justly considered almost *perfect* in their kind; and the frequency with which the Editor has heard it made a subject of regret by competent persons, that they were never detached from the main body of Butler's, to the much-occupied and not over-anxious reader, bulky and abstract work, has been one chief inducement with him to undertake the publication of them in this way. Prefixing these general remarks, and endeavouring, as well by occasional notes, and references to other approved authors on the same questions, as also by reference to other portions of Butler's own work, to make his sometimes difficult, though invaluable arguments, more readily understood and appreciated.

It is allowed on all hands, that the "Analogy" is, on first inspection, repulsive, even to the most anxious inquirer. The whole of the *first*

part is apt to discourage, while it detains from the particular examination of Christianity in the second part. Perhaps it would not be too much to say, that hundreds of persons living, who have been recommended to read Butler for a solution of their sceptical doubts respecting Christianity, have put down the work in despair, before they have reached the end of his chapter on a Future Life (for instance); some, more confused than ever, and others, full of metaphysical difficulties in the way of his, there excessively metaphysical, though admirable, positions; while, on the other hand, perhaps no individual living was ever directed (omitting, at least for the first reading, all the former part of the Analogy) immediately to the two unanswerable chapters alluded to, without rising from them convinced, that Christianity indeed has *all* that kind of proof of which such a matter is capable, and that such probability may very safely be taken henceforth as the guide and rule of life.

Those well versed in the arguments which Butler has here so ably and so comfortably handled (for indeed he has been a benefactor

to his race *) will not, perhaps, object to see these two chapters detached in this manner from the main body of his works, and published in this independent form. It has occurred to the Editor, that to such it may be acceptable to lend to friends, who, from age or circumstances, may not be equal nor required to master all the points which Butler has treated in the *Analogy*. Probably, also, it may not be unacceptable to those engaged in the higher departments of general education : † and, since the Editor has often heard the parochial clergy regretting *still*, amidst all the valuable treatises which never-

* “The revival of a taste for the writings of Bishop Butler, is one of the best signs of the times : for whether the demand for these writings originated with the laity themselves who would satisfy their own scruples, or with the clergy, who would supply them with the best means of doing so, no better choice could have been made ;—none more candid, more discreet, more according to knowledge.”—*Quarterly Review*, May, 1830.

† Ought not children to be taught the *nature* of the proof, and the positive evidences for the truth of their Bible, much earlier than is now commonly the case?—If they were so, would they not issue forth into the world, to the universities, and trades, and professions, with much less hazard of being disturbed by the sceptical and licentious?

theless exist, a manual which, from its brevity and force, might be more calculated to stem the torrent of that universal,* unlimited scepticism, which is the increasing characteristic of the present day. He is not without expectation, that this little publication may supply, the very deficiency of which they complain.

To *oppose* the present vigorous exertion of the human intellect in every department of scientific and new acquisition, he is persuaded the clergy will find impossible. Christianity will be more and more scrutinised, and the clergy must more and more prepare themselves to be "*always* ready, to give an answer, to every man that asketh them, a *reason* for the hope that is in them." And if those to whom we have a right to look for these reasons, are as* active and intelligent and conciliatory as they

* There is, I think, good reason for hoping that the sceptical tendency of the present age will be only a temporary evil; while it continues, however, it is an evil of the most alarming nature: and as it extends in general, not only to religion and morality, but, in some measure, also, to politics and the conduct of life, it is equally fatal to the comfort of the individual and the improvement of society.—*Dugald Stewart on Mind*; p. 36, 4th edition.

ought to be, the writer has no fears whatever as to the result.

Our intellectual capabilities were not conferred upon us to be squandered on, either, a superstitious admission of *any* set of religious tenets, amongst which we happen to be brought up, or, a sceptical rejection of *all*, because some have been found to be erroneous.

The proper line of duty for the guardians of the Christian faith, whether among the clergy or the laity, in times of peculiar and much irregular excitement like the present, is, to seek, not so much to curb or depress the spirit of universal inquiry, as rather, to restrain it only, and direct it, in such channels as may be productive of the most permanent, because well-founded, satisfaction, and enable men to rise to the highest useful capabilities of their being.

If the Deity has vouchsafed a revelation, and any *aid* to our moral and intellectual powers has been promised, that man labours under a palpable and serious disadvantage who neglects it.

It is freely owned, that the difficulties in the way of the student, whose mind has not been

properly regulated in such matters, are often, neither few nor inconsiderable. But, we do most cheerfully and confidently aver; that, as it *must* be perilous for a man to neglect what he has strong reason to believe *may* be true, and highly to concern him (though he has ever so many and so *great* doubts respecting it), so, if any one who shall peruse these pages shall be *really* anxious to have such doubts and perplexities removed, he shall *not* be disappointed in his labour. He shall assuredly find enough for him to *act* upon, and guide him comfortably through the remaining twilight of this mysterious existence, cheered by increasing beams of a more definite and enlivening hope upon his path, until that *perfect* day shall welcome him, where we shall know even as we are known.

At the same time, however, let it ever be borne in recollection, while pursuing investigations of this nature, how liable we are to prejudice, in things which we have no anxious wish may eventually prove true. Speculations concerning the designs and declared will of the Almighty, require great *calmness* of thought, and a rigid abstinence from every thing which

we either know or think, by displeasing, may induce Him for the present to *hide* from us the force of evidence which, attended to in a more serious and appropriate mood, we could not have missed seeing.

This is a part of the general subject which the writer designs to treat in another work on which he is engaged, designed as an antidote to more open and declared infidelity, and for the particular solution of all the most common and modern objections. But, in the *present* undertaking, having had chiefly in his eye the doubts and difficulties of professedly serious and *anxious* inquirers *only*, he does not think it needful to press a point which he has assuredly a right, taking them for in earnest, to *assume*.

He *supposes* the person taking up this little volume *really* desirous to know, whether Christianity is obligatory upon him as a rule for life and his guide to Heaven; whether, in fact, it does contain a *revelation* of the will of Him who placed him here, a probationer *for* heaven.

In this case, the ordinary dictates of what is usually termed "natural religion" will, at least,

not be unattended to. *Prayer* to the Fountain of all Wisdom to be guided right—the most unfeigned and profound humility *—a guarded abstinence from any thing of a *light* or *trifling* nature—and above all, from every thing confessedly, or however *remotely*, immoral and profane †—if either of these be overlooked, the mind will inevitably become unsteady and unfit for such investigations; and hence it is, that the inquiries of so many terminate only in increased perplexity and confusion.

It is so exceedingly difficult to maintain that calm philosophical posture of mind, in which alone we can expect to make any really useful advances in inquiries of this sort, that, the writer, with the same confidence that he offers

* The kingdom of man, which is founded in the sciences, cannot be entered otherwise than the *kingdom of God*; that is, in the condition of a little child.—Lord Bacon, quoted in No. 10, p. 25, *Library of Useful Knowledge*.—Bacon. *Nov. Org.*

† Religion cannot exist where immorality prevails, any more than a light can burn where the air is corrupted; and accordingly, infidelity was so general in France, as to predominate in almost every rank of society.—Sir W. Scott's *Life of Napoleon*. Vol. i, p. 54.

in the following pages, a solution of all the fair and real difficulties of the case, prognosticates, that his readers, even after their *heads* are convinced of the moral certainty of those truths, concerning which they once entertained such sturdy doubts, will yet find an unsurmountable difficulty in *retaining* that conviction of them, and a greater difficulty still, in *acting* up to them, and enlisting their hearts in love for them,* *without that superaddition of intellectual and moral energy* which the Scriptures will be found, freely, and unconditionally to hold forth, as the *gift, of Him* who conferred our minds upon us, in answer to our importunate and earnest prayers.

The system revealed in those sacred Records, the reader is assured, will be found in the highest

* See a powerful statement of this, by Blanco White, (Appendix, I.).

Also, Section 3 of a most ingenious recent publication, entitled, *Natural History of Enthusiasm*.

Also, Chapter 7 of Sheppard's *Thoughts on Private Devotion*.

Also, *Paley's Sermons* on the Influence of the Holy Spirit.

Davis's Estimate of Human Mind (concluding chapter).

degree rational, and full of promise for the aid and reparation of the too palpable obliquities both of the intellectual and active powers of our nature.* In the "so great salvation" therein revealed, he will discover a most full and adequate provision against the penal consequences of transgression, and the present power of sin,—and, as he advances, with that noble army of great and holy men who have trod with him these paths, and derived their strength from such sources, and been elevated above their kind by such expectations, he will, increasingly, be per-

* Whenever pure, evangelical religion finds an entrance into the mind, however dark and uninstructed that mind may previously have been, an expansion of its general powers is the speedy consequence. The judgment is preternaturally refined, a better taste and feeling for all social duties and moral proprieties are rapidly developed, and the faculties and perceptions, whether called forth on men, or books, or things, receive from an unseen source an increment of vital strength, that soon appears in all their operations.—*Portraiture of a Christian Gentleman.* By a Barrister. 1829. P. 82.

See also an extract from Sir Walter Scott's *Life of Napoleon*, in Appendix, No. II. (On Intellectual Advantages of Christianity).

See also, *Boyle on Greatness of Mind and Christianity.*

mitted to feel, what, though it was not before possible for him to disprove, he has hitherto, probably, treated only slightly, if not disparagingly, that, "he who believeth," has, *undoubtedly*, a species "of witness, IN HIMSELF." A spirit witnessing with his spirit, in a way which he cannot, looking back over the past, mistake, that he is indeed now a child of God, and an inheritor, upon the most sure and *substantial* grounds, of an eternal weight of happiness and glory; compared with which, the light momentary affliction of the way in which he may have been led to such consolatory persuasion, will appear most insignificant indeed.

It is under such general impression that the present work has been undertaken,—and it is with the most cheerful confidence of being permitted to impart something of his own now unclouded happiness on these subjects to his fellow creatures, that the writer invites their best attention to the positions and statements which are to follow.

CHAP. I.

On the Nature of the Proof of the Christian Religion.

“There remains one part of judgment, of great excellency, which we set down as deficient; for, indeed, Aristotle noted the thing, but no where pursueth the manner of acquiring it. The subject of the point is this; the different *kind of demonstrations and proofs*, to different kind of matter and subjects.”—*Lord Bacon. Advancement of Learning. Book v. chap. 4.*

It has been thought by some persons, that if the evidence of revelation appears doubtful, this itself turns into a positive argument against it; because it cannot be supposed that, if it were true, it would be left to subsist upon doubtful evidence. And the objection against revelation, from its not being universal, is often insisted upon, as of great weight.

Now, the weakness of these opinions may be shewn, by observing the suppositions on which they are founded, which are really such as these:—that it cannot be thought God would have bestowed any favour at all upon us, unless in the degree which we think he might, and which, we imagine, would be most to our particular advantage; and also, that it cannot be thought he would bestow a favour upon any, unless he bestowed the same upon all: suppositions which we find contradicted, not by a few instances in God's natural government of the world, but by the general analogy of nature together.

Persons who speak of the evidence of religion as doubtful, and of this supposed doubtfulness as a positive argument against it, should be put upon considering, what that evidence indeed is, which they act upon with regard to their temporal interests. For, it is not only extremely difficult, but, in many cases, absolutely impossible, to balance pleasure and pain, satisfaction and uneasiness, so as to be able to say on which side the overplus is. There are the like difficulties and impossibilities, in making the due

allowances for a change of temper and taste, for satiety, disgust, ill health; any of which render men incapable of enjoying, after they have obtained, what they most eagerly desired. Numberless, too, are the accidents, besides that one of untimely death, which may even probably disappoint the best concerted schemes; and strong objections are often seen to lie against them, not to be removed or answered, but which seem overbalanced by reason on the other side; so as that the certain difficulties and dangers of the pursuit are, by every one, thought justly disregarded, upon account of the appearing greater advantages in case of success, though there be but little probability of it. *Lastly*, Every one observes our liableness, if we be not upon our guard, to be deceived by the falsehood of men, and the false appearances of things; and this danger must be greatly increased, if there be a strong bias within, suppose from indulged passion, to favour the deceit. Hence arises that great uncertainty and doubtfulness of proof, wherein our temporal interest really consists; what are the most probable means of attaining it; and whether those

means will eventually be successful. *And numberless instances there are, in the daily course of life, in which all men think it reasonable to engage in pursuits, though the probability is greatly against succeeding; and to make such provision for themselves, as it is supposable they may have occasion for, though the plain acknowledged probability is, that they never shall.* Then those who think the objection against revelation, from its light not being universal, to be of weight, should observe, that the Author of nature, in numberless instances, bestows that upon some, which he does not upon others, who seem equally to stand in need of it. Indeed, he appears to bestow all his gifts, with the most promiscuous variety, among creatures of the same species: health and strength, capacities of prudence and of knowledge, means of improvement, riches, and all external advantages. And as there are not any two men found of exactly like shape and features, so, it is probable, there are not any two of an exactly like constitution, temper, and situation, with regard to the goods and evils of life. Yet, notwithstanding these uncertainties and varieties, God

does exercise a natural government over the world ; and there is such a thing as a prudent and imprudent institution of life, with regard to our health and our affairs, under that his natural government.

As neither the Jewish nor Christian revelation have been universal, and as they have been afforded to a greater or less part of the world, at different times ; so likewise, at different times, both revelations have had different degrees of evidence. The Jews who lived during the succession of prophets, that is, from Moses till after the Captivity, had higher evidence of the truth of their religion, than those had who lived in the interval between the last-mentioned period and the coming of Christ. And the first Christians had higher evidence of the miracles wrought in attestation of Christianity than what we have now. They had also a strong presumptive proof of the truth of it, perhaps of much greater force, in way of argument, than many think, of which we have very little remaining ; I mean, the presumptive proof of its truth, from the influence which it had upon the lives of the generality of its professors. And we, or future ages,

may possibly have a proof of it, which they could not have, from the conformity between the prophetic history and the state of the world, and of Christianity. And, farther ; if we were to suppose the evidence which some have of religion, to amount to little more than seeing that it may be true, but that they remain in great doubts and uncertainties about both its evidence and its nature, and great perplexities concerning the rule of life ; others to have a full conviction of the truth of religion, with a distinct knowledge of their duty ; and others severally to have all the intermediate degrees of religious light and evidence which lie between these two. If we put the case, that for the present it was intended revelation should be no more than a small light, in the midst of a world greatly overspread, notwithstanding it, with ignorance and darkness ; that certain glimmerings of this light should extend, and be directed, to remote distances, in such a manner, as that those who really partook of it should not discern from whence it originally came ; that some, in a nearer situation to it, should have its light obscured, and, in different ways and degrees, intercepted ; and that others

should be placed within its clearer influence, and be much more enlivened, cheered, and directed by it; but yet, that even to these it should be no more than "a light shining in a dark place:" all this would be perfectly uniform, and of a piece with the conduct of Providence, in the distribution of its other blessings. If the fact of the case really were, that some have received no light at all from the Scripture; as many ages and countries in the heathen world: that others, though they have by means of it had essential or natural religion enforced upon their consciences, yet have never had the genuine Scripture revelation, with its real evidence, proposed to their consideration; and the ancient Persians and modern Mahometans may possibly be instances of people in a situation somewhat like to this: that others, though they have had the Scripture laid before them as of divine revelation, yet have had it with the system and evidence of Christianity so interpolated, the system so corrupted, the evidence so blended with false miracles, as to leave the mind in the utmost doubtfulness and uncertainty about the whole; which may be the state of some thought-

ful men in most of those nations who call themselves Christian : and, *lastly*, that others have had Christianity offered to them in its genuine simplicity, and with its proper evidence, as persons in countries and churches of civil and of Christian liberty ; but, however, that even these persons are left in great ignorance in many respects, and have by no means light afforded them enough to satisfy their curiosity, but only to regulate their life, to teach them their duty, and encourage them in the careful discharge of it : I say, if we were to suppose this somewhat of a general true account of the degrees of moral and religious light and evidence, which were intended to be afforded mankind, and of what has actually been, and is their situation, in their moral and religious capacity, there would be nothing in all this ignorance, doubtfulness, and uncertainty, in all these varieties and supposed disadvantages of some in comparison of others, respecting religion ; but may be paralleled by manifest analogies in the natural dispensations of Providence at present, and considering ourselves merely in our temporal capacity.

Nor is there any thing shocking in all this, or

which would seem to bear hard upon the moral administration in nature, if we would really keep in mind, that every one shall be dealt equitably with ; instead of forgetting this, or explaining it away, after it is acknowledged in words. All shadow of injustice, and indeed all harsh appearances, in this various economy of Providence, would be lost, if we would keep in mind, that every merciful allowance shall be made, and no more be required of any one, than what might have been equitably expected of him, from the circumstances in which he was placed ; and not what might have been expected, had he been placed in other circumstances ; that is, in Scripture language, that every man shall be accepted “ according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not.” This, however, doth not by any means imply, that all persons’ condition here is equally advantageous with respect to futurity. And Providence designing to place some in greater darkness with respect to religious knowledge, is no more a reason why they should not endeavour to get out of that darkness, and others to bring them out of it, than why

ignorant and slow people, in matters of other knowledge, should not endeavour to learn, or should not be instructed.

It is not unreasonable to suppose, that the same wise and good principle, whatever it was, which disposed the Author of nature to make different kinds and orders of creatures, disposed him also to place creatures of like kinds in different situations; and that the same principle which disposed him to make creatures of different moral capacities, disposed him also to place creatures of like moral capacities in different religious situations: and even the same creatures, in different periods of their being. And the account or reason of this is, also, most probably the account why the constitution of things is such, as that creatures of moral natures or capacities, for a considerable part of that duration in which they are living agents, are not at all subjects of morality and religion; but grow up to be so, and grow up to be so more and more, gradually from childhood to mature age.

What, in particular, is the account or reason of these things, we must be greatly in the dark,

were it only that we know so very little even of our own case. Our present state may possibly be the consequence of somewhat past, which we are wholly ignorant of; as it has a reference to somewhat to come, of which we know scarce any more than is necessary for practice. A system or constitution, in its notion, implies variety: and so complicated an one as this world, very great variety. So that were revelation universal, yet from men's different capacities of understanding, from the different lengths of their lives, their different educations, and other external circumstances, and from their difference of temper and bodily constitution; their religious situations would be widely different, and the disadvantage of some in comparison of others, perhaps, altogether as much as at present. And the true account, whatever it be, why mankind, or such a part of mankind, are placed in this condition of ignorance, must be supposed also the true account of our farther ignorance, in not knowing the reasons why or whence it is that they are placed in this condition. But the following practical reflections may deserve the

serious consideration of those persons, who think the circumstances of mankind, or their own, in the forementioned respects, a ground of complaint.

First, The evidence of religion not appearing obvious, may constitute one particular part of some men's trial in the religious sense; as it gives scope for a virtuous exercise or vicious neglect of their understanding, in examining or not examining into that evidence. There seems no possible reason to be given, why we may not be in a state of moral probation, with regard to the exercise of our understanding upon the subject of religion, as we are with regard to our behaviour in common affairs. The former is a thing as much within our power and choice as the latter. And I suppose it is to be laid down for certain, that the same character, the same inward principle, which, after a man is convinced of the truth of religion, renders him obedient to the precepts of it, would, were he not thus convinced, set him about an examination of it, upon its system and evidence being offered to his thoughts; and that in the latter state, his

examination would be with an impartiality, seriousness, and solicitude, proportionable to what his obedience is in the former. And as inattention, negligence, want of all serious concern, about a matter of such a nature and such importance, when offered to men's consideration, is, before a distinct conviction of its truth, as real immoral depravity and dissoluteness, as neglect of religious practice after such conviction; so active solicitude about it, and fair, impartial consideration of its evidence before such conviction, is as really an exercise of a morally right temper, as is religious practice after. Thus, that religion is not intuitively true, but a matter of deduction and inference; that a conviction of its truth is not forced upon every one, but left to be, by some, collected with heedful attention to premises: this as much constitutes religious probation, as much affords sphere, scope, opportunity, for right and wrong behaviour, as any thing whatever does. And their manner of treating this subject, when laid before them, shews what is in their heart, and is an exertion of it.

Secondly, It appears to be a thing as evident,

though it is not so much attended to, that if, upon consideration of religion, the evidence of it should seem to any persons doubtful, in the highest supposable degree, even this doubtful evidence will, however, put them into a *general state of probation*, in the moral and religious sense. For, *suppose a man to be really in doubt whether such a person had not done him the greatest favour*; or, whether his whole temporal interest did not depend upon that person; no one, who had any sense of gratitude and of prudence, could possibly consider himself in the same situation with regard to such person, as if he had no such doubt. In truth, it is as just to say, that certainty and doubt are the same, as to say, the situations now mentioned would leave a man as entirely at liberty, in point of gratitude or prudence, as he would be, were he certain he had received no favour from such person, or that he no way depended upon him. And thus, though the evidence of religion which is afforded to some men, should be little more than that they are given to see the system of Christianity, or religion in general, to be supposable and credible, this ought in all

reason to beget a serious practical apprehension that it may be true. And even this will afford matter of exercise, for religious suspense and deliberation, for moral resolution and self-government; because the *apprehension that religion may be true, does as really lay men under obligations, as a full conviction that it is true.* It gives occasion and motives to consider farther the important subject; to preserve attentively upon their minds a general implicit sense that they may be under Divine moral government, an awful solicitude about religion, whether natural or revealed. Such apprehension ought to turn men's eyes to every degree of new light which may be had, from whatever side it comes, and induce them to refrain, in the mean time, from all immoralities, and live in the conscientious practice of every common virtue. Especially are they bound to keep at the greatest distance from all dissolute profaneness; for this the very nature of the case forbids; and to treat with highest reverence a matter upon which their own whole interest and being, and the fate of nature depends. This behaviour, and an active endeavour to maintain

within themselves this temper, is the business, the duty, and the wisdom of those persons, who complain of the doubtfulness of religion; is what they are under the most proper obligations to. And such behaviour is an exertion of, and has a tendency to improve in them, that character, which the practice of all the several duties of religion, from a full conviction of its truth, is an exertion of, and has a tendency to improve in others; others, I say, to whom God has afforded such conviction. Nay, considering the infinite importance of religion, revealed as well as natural, I think it may be said in general, that whoever will weigh the matter thoroughly, may see there *is not near so much difference, as is commonly imagined, between what ought in reason to be the rule of life, to those persons who are fully convinced of its truth, and to those who have only a serious doubting apprehension that it may be true.* Their hopes, and fears, and obligations, will be in various degrees; but, as the subject-matter of their hopes and fears is the same, so the subject-matter of their obligations, what they are bound to do and to refrain from, is not so very unlike.

It is to be observed farther, that, from a character of understanding, or a situation of influence in the world, some persons have it in their power to do infinitely more harm or good, by setting an example of profaneness and avowed disregard to all religion; or, on the contrary, of a serious, though perhaps doubting, apprehension of its truth, and of a reverend regard to it under this doubtfulness, than they can do by acting well or ill in all the common intercourses amongst mankind; and consequently they are most highly accountable for a behaviour, which, they may easily foresee, is of such importance, and in which there is most plainly a right and a wrong; even admitting the evidence of religion to be as doubtful as is pretended.

The ground of these observations, and that which renders them just and true, is, that *doubting necessarily implies some degree of evidence for that of which we doubt.* For no person would be in doubt concerning the truth of a number of facts so and so circumstanced, which should accidentally come into his thoughts, and of which he had no evidence at all. And

though in the case of an even chance, and where consequently we were in doubt, we should in common language say, that we had no evidence at all for either side: yet that situation of things, which renders it an even chance and no more, that such an event will happen, renders this case equivalent to all others, where there is such evidence on both sides of a question, as leaves the mind in doubt concerning the truth. Indeed, in all these cases, there is no more evidence on the one side than on the other; but there is (what is equivalent to) much more for either, than for the truth of a number of facts which come into one's thoughts at random. And thus, in all these cases, *doubt as much presupposes evidence, lower degrees of evidence, as belief presupposes higher, and certainty, higher still.* Any one, who will a little attend to the nature of evidence, will easily carry this observation on, and see, that between no evidence at all, and that degree of it which affords ground of doubt, there are as many intermediate degrees, as there are between that degree which is the ground of doubt, and demonstration. And, though we have not facul-

ties to distinguish these degrees of evidence, with any sort of exactness, yet, in proportion as they are discerned, they ought to influence our practice. For it is as real an imperfection in the moral character, not to be influenced in practice, by a lower degree of evidence when discerned, as it is in the understanding, not to discern it. And as, in all subjects which men consider, they discern the lower as well as higher degrees of evidence, proportionably to their capacity of understanding ; so, in practical subjects, they are influenced in practice, by the lower as well as higher degrees of it, proportionably to their fairness and honesty. And as, in proportion to defects in the understanding, men are unapt to see lower degrees of evidence, are in danger of overlooking evidence when it is not glaring, and are easily imposed upon in such cases ; so, in proportion to the corruption of the heart, they seem capable of satisfying themselves with having no regard in practice to evidence acknowledged real, if it be not overbearing. From these things it must follow, that doubting concerning religion implies such a degree of evidence for

it, as, joined with the consideration of its importance, unquestionably lays men under the obligations before-mentioned, to have a dutiful regard to it in all their behaviour.

Thirdly, The difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved, which some complain of, is no more a just ground of complaint, than the external circumstances of temptation, which others are placed in ; or than difficulties in the practice of it, after a full conviction of its truth. Temptations render our state a more improving state of discipline, than it would be otherwise ; as they give occasion for a more attentive exercise of the virtuous principle, which confirms and strengthens it more than an easier or less attentive exercise of it could. Now, speculative difficulties are, in this respect, of the very same nature with these external temptations. For the evidence of religion not appearing obvious, is, to some persons, a temptation to reject it, without any consideration at all ; and therefore requires such an attentive exercise of the virtuous principle, seriously to consider that evidence, as there would be no occasion for, but for such temptation. And the sup-

posed doubtfulness of its evidence, after it has been in some sort considered, affords opportunity to an unfair mind, of explaining away, and deceitfully hiding from itself, that evidence which it might see: and also for men's encouraging themselves in vice, from hopes of impunity, though they do clearly see thus much at least, that these hopes are uncertain: in like manner as the common temptation to many instances of folly, which end in temporal infamy and ruin, is the ground for hope of not being detected, and of escaping with impunity; that is, the doubtfulness of the proof beforehand, that such foolish behaviour will thus end in infamy and ruin. On the contrary, supposed doubtfulness in the evidence of religion calls for a more careful and attentive exercise of the virtuous principle, in fairly yielding themselves up to the proper influence of any real evidence, though doubtful; and in practising conscientiously all virtue, though under some uncertainty, whether the government in the universe may not possibly be such, as that vice may escape with impunity. And, in general, temptation, meaning by this

word the lesser allurements to wrong, and difficulties in the discharge of our duty, as well as the greater ones; temptation, I say, as such, and of every kind and degree, as it calls forth some virtuous efforts, additional to what would otherwise have been wanting, cannot but be an additional discipline and improvement of virtue, as well as probation of it, in the other senses of that word. So that the very same account is to be given, why the evidence of religion should be left in such a manner, as to require, in some, an attentive, solicitous, perhaps painful, exercise of their understanding about it; as why others should be placed in such circumstances, as that the practice of its common duties, after a full conviction of the truth of it, should require attention, solicitude, and pains; or why appearing doubtfulness should be permitted to afford matter of temptation to some; as why external difficulties and allurements should be permitted to afford matter of temptation to others. The same account also is to be given, why some should be exercised with temptations of both these kinds, as why others should be exercised with the latter in such very high degrees, as

some have been, particularly as the primitive Christians were.

Nor does there appear any absurdity in supposing, that the speculative difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved, may make even the principal part of some persons' trial. For, as the chief temptations of the generality of the world, are the ordinary motives to injustice or unrestrained pleasure; or to live in the neglect of religion, from that frame of mind, which renders many persons almost without feeling as to any thing distant, or which is not the object of their senses; so there are other persons without this shallowness of temper, persons of a deeper sense as to what is invisible and future, who not only see, but have a general practical feeling, that what is to come will be present, and that things are not less real, for their not being the objects of sense; and who, from their natural constitution of body and of temper, and from their external condition, may have small temptations to behave ill, small difficulty in behaving well, in the common course of life. Now, when these latter persons have a distinct, full conviction of the

truth of religion, without any possible doubts or difficulties, the practice of it is to them unavoidable, unless they will do a constant violence to their own minds ; and religion is scarce any more a discipline to them, than it is to creatures in a state of perfection. Yet these persons may possibly stand in need of moral discipline and exercise in a higher degree than they would have by such an easy practice of religion. Or it may be requisite, for reasons unknown to us, that they should give some further manifestation what is their moral character, to the creation of God, than such a practice of it would be. *Thus, in the great variety of religious situations in which men are placed, what constitutes, what chiefly and peculiarly constitutes the probation in all senses, of some persons, may be the difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved ; and their principal and distinguished trial may be, how they will behave under and with respect to these difficulties.* Circumstances in men's situation in their temporal capacity, analogous in good measure to this, respecting religion, are to be observed. We find, some persons are placed in such a situation in the world, as

that their chief difficulty, with regard to conduct, is not the doing what is prudent when it is known; for this, in numberless cases, is as easy as the contrary: but to some, the principal exercise is, recollection, and being upon their guard against deceits, the deceits, suppose, of those about them; against false appearances of reason and prudence. To persons in some situations, the principal exercise, with respect to conduct, is attention, in order to inform themselves what is proper, what is really the reasonable and prudent part to act.

But as I have hitherto gone upon supposition, that men's dissatisfaction with the evidence of religion, is not owing to their neglects or prejudices; it must be added, on the other hand, in all common reason, and as what the truth of the case plainly requires should be added, that such dissatisfaction possibly may be owing to those, possibly may be men's own fault. For,

If there are any persons who never set themselves heartily, and in earnest, to be informed in religion; if there are any, who secretly wish it may not prove true, and are less attentive to

evidence than to difficulties, and more to objections, than to what is said in answer to them; these persons will scarce be thought in a likely way of seeing the evidence of religion, though it were most certainly true, and capable of being ever so fully proved. * If any accustom themselves to consider this subject usually in the way of mirth and sport; if they attend to forms and representations, and inadequate manners of expression, instead of the real things intended by them, (for signs often can be no more than inadequately expressive of the things signified); or, if they substitute human errors in the room of divine truth; why may not all, or any of these things, hinder some men from seeing that

* “ Nothing but the most frivolous dissipation of thoughts can make even the inconsiderate forget the supreme importance of every thing which relates to the expectation of a future existence. Whilst the infidel mocks at the superstitions of the vulgar, insults over their incredulous fears, their childish errors, or fantastic rites, it does not occur to him to observe that the most preposterous device, by which the weakest devotee ever believed he was securing the happiness of a future life, is more rational than unconcern about it. Upon this subject nothing is so absurd as indifference, no folly so contemptible as thoughtlessness and levity.”

evidence, which really is seen by others ; as a like turn of mind, with respect to matters of common speculation and practice, does, we find by experience, hinder them from attaining that knowledge and right understanding, in matters of common speculation and practice, which more fair and attentive minds attain to ? And the effect will be the same, whether their neglect of seriously considering the evidence of religion, and their indirect behaviour with regard to it, proceed from mere carelessness, or from the grosser vices ; or whether it be owing to this, that forms, and figurative manners of expression, as well as errors, administer occasions of ridicule, when the things intended, and the truth itself, would not. Men may indulge a ludicrous turn so far, as to lose all sense of conduct and prudence in worldly affairs, and even, as it seems, to impair their faculty of reason. And, in general, levity, carelessness, passion, and prejudice, do hinder us from being rightly informed with respect to common things ; and they may, in like manner, and perhaps in some farther providential manner, with respect to moral and religious subjects ;

may hinder evidence from being laid before us, and from being seen when it is. The Scripture* does declare, "that every one shall not understand." And it makes no difference by what providential conduct this comes to pass; whether the evidence of Christianity was, originally and with design, put and left so, as that those who are desirous of evading moral obligations, should not see it, and that honest-minded persons should; or whether it comes to pass by any other means.

Farther: the general proof of natural religion and of Christianity does, I think, lie level to common men; even those, the greatest part of whose time, from childhood to old age, is taken

* Dan. xii. 10. See also Isaiah xxix. 13, 14. Matt. vi. 23, and xi. 25, and xiii. 11, 12. John iii. 19, and v. 44. 1 Cor. ii. 14; and 2 Cor. iv. 4. 2 Tim. iii. 13; and that affectionate, as well as authoritative admonition, so very many times inculcated, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Grotius saw so strongly the thing intended in these and other passages of Scripture of the like sense, as to say, that the proof given us of Christianity was less than it might have been, for this very purpose: *Ut its sermo Evangelii tanquam lapis esset Lydius ad quem ingenia sanabilia explorarentur.* De Ver. R. C. lib. 2. towards the end.

up with providing for themselves and their families the common conveniences, perhaps necessities of life; those, I mean, of this rank, who ever think at all of asking after proof, or attending to it. Common men, were they as much in earnest about religion as about their temporal affairs, are capable of being convinced upon real evidence, that there is a God who governs the world; and they feel themselves to be of a moral nature, and accountable creatures. And as Christianity entirely falls in with this their natural sense of things, so they are capable, not only of being persuaded, but of being made to see, that there is evidence of miracles wrought in attestation of it, and many appearing completions of prophecy. But though this proof is real and conclusive, yet it is liable to objections, and may be run up into difficulties; which, however, persons who are capable, not only of talking of, but of really seeing, are capable also of seeing through; that is (not of clearing up and answering them, so as to satisfy their *curiosity*, for of such knowledge we are not capable with respect to any one thing in nature; but capable) of

seeing that the proof is not lost in these difficulties, or destroyed by these objections. But then a thorough examination into religion, with regard to these objections, which cannot be the business of every man, is a matter of pretty large compass, and, from the nature of it, requires some knowledge, as well as time and attention, to see how the evidence comes out, upon balancing one thing with another, and what, upon the whole, is the amount of it. Now, if persons who have picked up these objections from others, and take for granted they are of weight, upon the word of those from whom they received them; or, by often retailing of them, come to see, or fancy they see, them to be of weight, will not prepare themselves for such an examination, with a competent degree of knowledge; or will not give that time and attention to the subject, which, from the nature of it, is necessary for attaining such information: *in this case, they must remain in doubtfulness, ignorance, or error; in the same way as they must with regard to common sciences, and matters of common life, if they neglect the necessary means of being informed in them.*

But still, perhaps, it will be objected, that if a prince or common master were to send directions to a servant, he would take care that they should always bear the certain marks who they came from, and that their sense should be always plain ; so as that there should be no possible doubt, if he could help it, concerning the authority or meaning of them. Now, the proper answer to all this kind of objections is, that, wherever the fallacy lies, it is even certain we cannot argue thus with respect to Him who is the governor of the world ; and particularly that he does not afford us such information, with respect to our temporal affairs and interests, as experience abundantly shews. However, there is a full answer to this objection, from the very nature of religion. For the reason why a prince would give his directions in this plain manner, is that he absolutely desires such an external action should be done, without concerning himself with the motive or principle upon which it is done ; that is, he regards only the external event, or the thing being done, and not at all, properly speaking, the doing of it, or the action. Whereas, the whole of morality

and religion consisting merely in action itself, there is no sort of parallel between the cases. But if the prince be supposed to regard only the action; that is, only to desire to exercise, or in any sense prove the understanding or loyalty of a servant, he would not always give his orders in such a plain manner. It may be proper to add, that the will of God, respecting morality and religion, may be considered either as absolute or as only conditional. If it be absolute, it can only be thus, that we should act virtuously in such given circumstances; not that we should be brought to act so, by his changing of our circumstances. And if God's will be thus absolute, then it is in our power, in the highest and strictest sense, to do or to contradict his will; which is a most weighty consideration. Or his will may be considered only as conditional,—that if we act so and so, we shall be rewarded; if otherwise, punished: of which conditional will of the Author of nature, the whole constitution of it affords most certain instances.

Upon the whole: that we are in a state of religion necessarily implies, that we are in a state of probation: and the credibility of our being at

all in such a state being admitted, there seems no peculiar difficulty in supposing our probation to be, just as it is, in those respects which are above objected against. There seems no pretence, from *the reason of the thing*, to say, that the trial cannot equitably be any thing, but whether persons will act suitably to certain information, or such as admits no room for doubt; so as that there can be no danger of miscarriage, but either from their not attending to what they certainly know, or from overbearing passion hurrying them on to act contrary to it. For, since ignorance and doubt afford scope for probation in all senses, as really as intuitive conviction or certainty; and since the two former are to be put to the same account, as difficulties in practice; men's moral probation may also be, whether they will take due care to inform themselves by impartial consideration, and afterwards whether they will act as the case requires, upon the evidence which they have, however doubtful. And this, we find by *experience*, is frequently our probation, in our temporal capacity. For *the information which we want, with regard to our worldly interests, is by no means always given us of*

course, without any care of our own. And we are greatly liable to self-deceit from inward secret prejudices; and also to the deceit of others. So that to be able to judge what is the prudent part, often requires much and difficult consideration. Then, *after we have judged the very best we can, the evidence upon which we must act, if we will live and act at all, is perpetually doubtful to a very high degree.* And the constitution and course of the world in fact is such, as that want of impartial consideration what we have to do, and venturing upon extravagant courses, because it is doubtful what will be the consequences, are often naturally, that is, providentially, altogether as fatal, as misconduct occasioned by heedless inattention to what we certainly know, or disregarding it from overbearing passion.

Several of the observations here made may well seem strange, perhaps unintelligible to many good men. But if the persons for whose sake they are made, think so; persons who object as above, and throw off all regard to religion under pretence of want of evidence; I desire them to consider again, whether their

thinking so, be owing to any thing unintelligible in these observations, or to their own not having such a sense of religion, and serious solicitude about it, as even their state of scepticism does in all reason require? It ought to be forced upon the reflection of these persons, that *our nature and condition necessarily require us, in the daily course of life, to act upon evidence much lower than what is commonly called probable; to guard not only against what we fully believe will, but also against what we think it supposable may, happen; and to engage in pursuits when the probability is greatly against success, if it be credible that possibly we may succeed in them.**

* On the general subjects of this Chapter, the reader may consult,

Dr. *Paley's* justly celebrated work, part iii. ch. 6, "On the want of Universality in the knowledge and reception of Christianity, and of greater clearness in the Evidence."

Paper by *Addison*, in *the Spectator*, No. 465, "On Means of Strengthening and Confirming Faith."

Blanco White's Internal Evid. against Cath. p. 26-28. 2d edit. 1826. (See Appendix, III.)

Sumner's Internal Evid. (concluding chapter).

Hartley, in the 2d vol. of his *Observations on Man*, has some good Chapters on these points.

As also, the great *Samuel Clarke* (the metaphysician), in his inimitable *Treatise on the Evidences*.

CHAP. II.

On the particular Evidence for Christianity.

“ For my own part, gentlemen, I have been ever deeply devoted to the truths of Christianity, and my firm belief in the Holy Gospel is by no means owing to the prejudices of education, (though I was religiously educated by the best of parents), but arises, from the fullest and most continued reflections of my riper years and understanding. It forms at this moment the greatest consolation of a life which as a shadow must pass away.”—*Lord Erskine's Speech in Court of King's Bench, 24th June, 1797.*

THE presumptions against revelation, and objections against the general scheme of Christianity, and particular things relating to it, being removed,* there remains to be considered, what positive evidence we have for the truth

* If the student of these pages has opportunity and inclination, he will be well repaid on turning to the first five Chapters of the second part of the “*Analogy*,” to which allusion is here made :—

of it : chiefly in order to see, what the analogy of nature suggests with regard to that evidence, and the objections against it ; or to see what is, and is allowed to be, the plain natural rule of judgment and of action in our temporal concerns, in cases where we have the same kind of evidence, and the same kind of objections against it, that we have in the case before us.

Now, in the evidence of Christianity, there seems to be several things of great weight, not reducible to the head, either of miracles, or the completion of prophecy, in the common acceptation of the words. But these two are its direct and fundamental proofs ; and those other things, however considerable they are,

The first, treats,

1. Of the *importance* of Christianity.
2. Of the supposed presumption against a revelation considered as *miraculous*.
3. Of our incapacity of judging, what *were to be expected* in a revelation ; and the credibility from analogy, that it *must contain things appearing liable to objections*.
4. Of Christianity considered as a *scheme, or constitution*, imperfectly comprehended.
5. Of the *particular system* of Christianity, the appointment of a *mediator*, and the redemption of the world by him.

yet ought never to be urged apart from its direct proofs; but always to be joined with them.

Thus the evidence of Christianity will be a long series of things, reaching, as it seems, from the beginning of the world to the present time, of great variety and compass, taking in both the direct, and also the collateral proofs, and making up, all of them together, one argument; the conviction arising from which kind of proof may be compared to what they call *the effect* in architecture or other works of art; a result from a great number of things so and so disposed, and taken into one view.

I shall therefore, 1st, *make some observations relating to miracles, and the appearing completions of prophecy; and consider what analogy suggests, in answer to the OBJECTIONS brought against this evidence.*

And, 2dly, *I shall endeavour to give some account of the general argument now mentioned, consisting both of the direct and collateral evidence, CONSIDERED AS MAKING UP ONE ARGUMENT: this being the kind of proof, upon which we determine most questions of difficulty*

concerning common facts, alleged to have happened, or seeming like to happen; especially questions relating to conduct.

First, I shall make some observations upon the direct proof of Christianity from miracles and prophecy, and upon the objections alleged against it.

I. Now, the following observations, relating to the historical evidence of *miracles* wrought in attestation of Christianity, appear to me of great weight.

1. The Old Testament affords us the same historical evidence of the miracles of Moses and of the prophets, as of the common civil history of Moses and the kings of Israel; or, as of the affairs of the Jewish nation. And the Gospels and the Acts afford us the same historical evidence of the miracles of Christ and the Apostles, as of the common matters related in them. This, indeed, could not have been affirmed by any reasonable man, if the authors of these books, like many other historians, had appeared to make an entertaining manner of writing their aim; though they had interspersed miracles in their works, at proper distances, and upon proper occasions. These

might have animated a dull relation, amused the reader, and engaged his attention. And the same account would naturally have been given of them, as of the speeches and descriptions of such authors; the same account, in a manner, as is to be given, why the poets make use of wonders and prodigies. But the facts, both miraculous and natural, in Scripture, are related in plain unadorned narratives: and both of them appear, in all respects, to stand upon the same footing of historical evidence. Farther: some parts of Scripture, containing an account of miracles fully sufficient to prove the truth of Christianity, are quoted as genuine, from the age in which they are said to be written, down to the present: and no other parts of them, material in the present question, are omitted to be quoted in such manner, as to afford any sort of proof of their not being genuine. And, as common history, when called in question in any instance, may often be greatly confirmed by contemporary or subsequent events more known and acknowledged; and as the common Scripture history, like many others, is thus confirmed; so like-

wise is the miraculous history of it, not only in particular instances, but in general. For, the establishment of the Jewish and Christian religions, which were events contemporary with the miracles related to be wrought in attestation of both, or subsequent to them, these events are just what we should have expected, upon supposition such miracles were really wrought to attest the truth of those religions. These miracles are a satisfactory account of those events, of which no other satisfactory account can be given, nor any account at all, but what is imaginary merely and invented. It is to be added, that the most obvious, the most easy and direct account of this history, how it came to be written, and to be received in the world as a true history, is, that it really is so; nor can any other account of it be easy and direct. Now, though an account, not at all obvious, but very far-fetched and indirect, may indeed be, and often is, the true account of a matter; yet, it cannot be admitted on the authority of its being asserted. Mere guess, supposition, and possibility, when opposed to historical evidence, prove nothing, but that historical evidence is not demonstrative.

Now, the just consequence from all this, I think, is, that the Scripture history, in general, is to be admitted as an authentic, genuine history, till somewhat positive be alleged sufficient to invalidate it. But no man will deny the consequence to be, that it cannot be rejected, or thrown by as of no authority, till it can be proved to be of none; even though the evidence now mentioned for its authority were doubtful. This evidence may be confronted by historical evidence on the other side if there be any; or general incredibility in the things related, or inconsistency in the general turn of the history, would prove it to be of no authority. But since, upon the face of the matter, upon a first and general view, the appearance is, that it is an authentic history, it cannot be determined to be fictitious without some proof that it is so. And the following observations, in support of these, and coincident with them, will greatly confirm the historical evidence for the truth of Christianity.

2. The Epistles of St. Paul, from the nature of epistolary writing, and moreover, from several of them being written, not to particular persons, but to churches, carry in them evidences of

their being genuine, beyond what can be, in a mere historical narrative, left to the world at large.* This evidence, joined with that which they have in common with the rest of the New Testament, seems not to leave so much as any particular pretence for denying their genuineness, considered as an ordinary matter of fact, or of criticism. I say, particular pretence for denying it; because any single fact of such a kind and such antiquity, may have general doubts raised *concerning it, from the very nature of human affairs and human testimony. There is also to be mentioned, a distinct and particular evidence of the genuineness of the Epistle chiefly referred to here, the first to the Corinthians; from the manner in which it is quoted by Clemens Romanus, in an epistle of his own to that Church.† Now, these epistles afford a proof of Christianity, detached from

* Consult "*Horæ Paulinæ*, or the truth of the Scripture History of St. Paul, evinced, by a comparison of the Epistles which bear his name, with the Acts of the Apostles and with one another."—By *Wm. Paley*.

Also, "*Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*."—By *George Lord Lyttleton*.

† Clem. Rom. Ep. I. ch. 47.

all others, which is, I think, a thing of weight; and also a proof of a nature and kind peculiar to itself. For,

In them the author declares, that he received the Gospel in general, and the institution of the communion in particular, not from the rest of the apostles, or jointly together with them, but alone, from Christ himself; whom he declares, likewise, conformably to the history in the Acts, that he saw after his ascension.* So that the testimony of St. Paul is to be considered as detached from that of the rest of the apostles.

And he declares further, that he was endued with a power of working miracles, as what was publicly known to this very people; speaks of frequent and great variety of miraculous gifts, as then subsisting in those very churches to which he was writing; which he was reproving for several irregularities, and where he had personal opposers: he mentions these gifts incidentally, in the most easy manner, and without effort; by way of reproof to those who had them, for their indecent use of them; and by

* Gal. i. 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c. 1 Cor. xv. 8.

way of depreciating them, in comparison of moral virtues. In short, he speaks to these churches, of these miraculous powers, in the manner any one would speak to another of a thing, which was as familiar, and as much known in common to them both, as any thing in the world.* And this, as hath been observed by several persons, is surely a very considerable thing.

3. It is an acknowledged historical fact, that Christianity offered itself to the world, and demanded to be received, upon the allegation, that is, as unbelievers would speak, upon the pretence of miracles, publicly wrought to attest the truth of it in such an age : and that it was actually received by great numbers in that very age, and upon the professed belief of the reality of these miracles. And Christianity, including the dispensation of the Old Testament, seems distinguished by this from all other religions. I mean that this does not appear to be the case with regard to any other. For surely it will not

* Rom. xv. 19. 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9, 10—28, &c. and chap. xiii. 1, 2, 8, and the whole xiv. chap. 2 Cor. xii. 12, 13. Gal. iii. 2, 5.

be supposed to lie upon any person, to prove, by positive historical evidence, that it was not. It does in no sort appear that Mahometanism was first received in the world upon the footing of supposed miracles,* that is, public ones : for, as revelation is itself miraculous, all pretence to it must necessarily imply some pretence of miracles. And it is a known fact, that it was immediately, at the very first, propagated by other means. And as particular institutions, whether in paganism or popery, said to be confirmed by miracles, after those institutions had obtained, are not to the purpose; so, were there what might be called historical proof, that any of them were introduced by a supposed divine command, believed to be attested by miracles, these would not be in any wise parallel. For single things of this sort are easy to be accounted for, after parties are formed, and have power in their hands; and the leaders of them are in veneration with the multitude; and political interests are blended with religious claims, and religious distinctions. But before any thing of

* See the Koran, chap. xiii. and xvii.

this kind, for a few persons, and those of the lowest rank, all at once, to bring over such great numbers to a new religion, and get it to be received upon the particular evidence of miracles; this is quite another thing. And I think it will be allowed by any fair adversary, that the fact now mentioned, taking in all the circumstances of it, is peculiar to the Christian religion. However, the fact itself is allowed, that Christianity obtained, that is, was professed to be received in the world, upon the belief of miracles, immediately in the age in which it is said those miracles were wrought: or that this is what its first converts would have alleged, as the reason for their embracing it. Now, certainly it is not to be supposed, that such numbers of men, in the most distant parts of the world, should forsake the religion of their country, in which they had been educated; separate themselves from their friends, particularly in their festival shews and solemnities, to which the common people are so greatly addicted, and which were of a nature to engage them much more than any thing of that sort amongst us; and embrace a religion, which could not but expose them

to many inconveniences, and indeed must have been a giving up the world in a great degree, even from the very first, and before the empire engaged in form against them: it cannot be supposed, that such numbers should make so great and, to say the least, so inconvenient a change in their whole institution of life, unless they were really convinced of the truth of those miracles, upon the knowledge or belief of which they professed to make it. And it will, I suppose, readily be acknowledged, that the generality of the first converts to Christianity must have believed them; that as, by becoming Christians, they declared to the world they were satisfied of the truth of those miracles, so this declaration was to be credited. And this their testimony is the same kind of evidence for those miracles, as if they had put it in writing, and these writings had come down to us. And it is real evidence, because it is of facts, which they had capacity and full opportunity to inform themselves of. It is also distinct from the direct or express historical evidence, though it is of the same kind; and it would be allowed to be

distinct in all cases. For, were a fact expressly related by one or more ancient historians, and disputed in after ages; that this fact is acknowledged to have been believed, by great numbers of the age in which the historian says it was done, would be allowed an additional proof of such fact, quite distinct from the express testimony of the historian. The credulity of mankind is acknowledged, and the suspicions of mankind ought to be acknowledged too; and their backwardness even to believe, and greater still to practise, what makes against their interest. And it must particularly be remembered, that education, and prejudice, and authority, were against Christianity, in the age I am speaking of. So that the immediate conversion of such numbers, is a real presumption of somewhat more than human in this matter: I say presumption, for it is not alleged as a proof, alone and by itself. Nor need any one of the things mentioned in this chapter be considered as a proof by itself; and yet all of them together may be one of the strongest.

Upon the whole: as there is large historical

evidence, both direct and circumstantial, of miracles wrought in attestation of Christianity, collected by those who have writ upon the subject, it lies upon unbelievers to shew, why this evidence is not to be credited. This way of speaking is, I think, just, and what persons who write in defence of religion naturally fall into. Yet in a matter of such unspeakable importance, the proper question is not whom it lies upon, according to the rules of argument, to maintain or confute objections; but whether there really are any against this evidence, sufficient in reason to destroy the credit of it? However, unbelievers seem to take upon them the part of shewing that there are.

They allege, that numberless enthusiastic people, in different ages and countries, expose themselves to the same difficulties which the primitive Christians did; and are ready to give up their lives for the most idle follies imaginable. But it is not very clear, to what purpose this objection is brought. For every one, surely, in every case, must distinguish between opinions and facts. And though testi-

mony is no proof of enthusiastic opinions, or of any opinions at all, yet it is allowed, in all other cases, to be a proof of facts. And a person laying down his life in attestation of facts, or of opinions, is the strongest proof of his believing them. And if the apostles and their contemporaries did believe the facts, in attestation of which they exposed themselves to sufferings and death,* this their belief, or rather knowledge, must be a proof of those facts; for they were such as came under the observation of their senses. And though it is not of equal weight, yet it is of weight, that the martyrs of the next age, notwithstanding they were not eye-witnesses of those facts, as were the apostles and their contemporaries, had,

* "By only not bearing testimony they might have avoided all their sufferings, and have lived quietly. Would men in such circumstances pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts that they had no knowledge of; go about lying to teach virtue; and though not only convinced of Christ being an impostor, but have seen the success of his imposture in his crucifixion, yet persist in carrying it on; and so persist, as to bring upon themselves for nothing, and with a full knowledge of the consequence, enmity and hatred, danger and death?"—*Paley*.

however, full opportunity to inform themselves whether they were true or not, and give equal proof of their believing them to be true.

But enthusiasm, it is said, greatly weakens the evidence of testimony, even for facts, in matters relating to religion; some seem to think it totally and absolutely destroys the evidence of testimony upon this subject. And, indeed, the powers of enthusiasm, and of diseases, too, which operate in a like manner, are very wonderful, in particular instances. But if great numbers of men, not appearing in any peculiar degree weak, nor under any peculiar suspicion of negligence, affirm that they saw and heard such things plainly with their eyes and their ears, and are admitted to be in earnest; such testimony is evidence of the strongest kind we can have, for any matter of fact. Yet, possibly it may be overcome, strong as it is, by incredibility in the things thus attested, or by contrary testimony. And in an instance where one thought it was so overcome, it might be just to consider, how far such evidence could be accounted for by enthusiasm; for it seems as if no other imaginable account were to be given

of it. But till such incredibility be shewn, or contrary testimony produced, it cannot surely be expected, that so far-fetched, so indirect and wonderful an account of such testimony, as that of enthusiasm must be; an account so strange, that the generality of mankind can scarce be made to understand what is meant by it; it cannot, I say, be expected, that such account will be admitted of such evidence, when there is this direct, easy, and obvious account of it, that people really saw and heard a thing not incredible, which they affirm sincerely, and with full assurance, they did see and hear. Granting, then, that enthusiasm is not (strictly speaking) an absurd, but a possible account of such testimony, it is manifest that the very mention of it goes upon the previous supposition, that the things so attested are incredible; and therefore need not be considered, till they are shewn to be so. Much less need it be considered, after the contrary has been proved. And I think it has been proved, to full satisfaction, that there is no incredibility in revelation, in general, or in such a one as the Christian, in particular. However, as religion is supposed

peculiarly liable to enthusiasm, it may just be observed, that prejudices almost without number, and without name, romance, affectation, humour, a desire to engage attention or to surprise, the party-spirit, custom, little competitions, unaccountable likings and dislikings; these influence men strongly in common matters. And as these prejudices are often scarce known or reflected upon by the persons themselves who are influenced by them, they are to be considered as influences of a like kind to enthusiasm. Yet human testimony in common matters is naturally and justly believed notwithstanding.

It is intimated farther, in a more refined way of observation, that though it should be proved, that the apostles and first Christians, could not, in some respects, be deceived themselves, and, in other respects, cannot be thought to have intended to impose upon the world, yet, it will not follow, that their general testimony is to be believed, though truly handed down to us; because they might still in part, that is, in other respects, be deceived themselves, and in part also designedly impose upon others; which, it is added, is a thing very credible, from that

mixture of real enthusiasm, and real knavery, to be met with in the same characters. And, I must confess, I think the matter of fact contained in this observation upon mankind, is not to be denied: and that somewhat very much a-kin to it, is often supposed in Scripture, as a very common case, and most severely re-proved. But it were to have been expected, that persons capable of applying this observation, as applied in the objection, might also frequently have met with the like mixed character, in instances where religion was quite out of the case. The thing plainly is, that mankind are naturally endued with reason, or a capacity of distinguishing between truth and falsehood; and as naturally they are endued with veracity, or a regard to truth in what they say: but from many occasions, they are liable to be prejudiced, and biassed, and deceived themselves, and capable of intending to deceive others, in every different degree; insomuch that, as we are all liable to be deceived by prejudice, so likewise it seems to be not an uncommon thing, for persons who, from their regard to truth, would not invent a lie entirely without

any foundation at all, to propagate it with heightening circumstances, after it is once invented, and set a-going. And others, though they would not propagate a lie, yet, which is a lower degree of falsehood, will let it pass without contradiction. *But, notwithstanding all this, human testimony remains still a natural ground of assent; and this assent, a natural principle of action.*

It is objected farther, that however it has happened, the fact is, that mankind have, in different ages, been strangely deluded with pretences to miracles and wonders. But it is by no means to be admitted, that they have been oftener, or are at all more liable to be deceived by these pretences, than by others.

It is added, that there is a very considerable degree of historical evidence for miracles,* which

* On the nature of the evidence for the Christian miracles; their distinction from any other asserted ones; and for a particular refutation of the three cases with which one of the acutest adversaries of Christianity has chosen to confront the miracles of the New Testament,—see *Paley's* two inimitable Chapters. Part I. Prop. 2.

Also, *Butler's* short, but most convincing Chapter, (Analogy, Part II. chap. 2,) “Of the supposed presumption against a Revelation considered as miraculous.”

are on all hands, acknowledged to be fabulous. But suppose that there were even the like historical evidence for these, to what there is for those alleged in proof of Christianity, which yet is in nowise allowed, but suppose this; the consequence would not be, that the evidence of the latter is not to be admitted. Nor is there a man in the world who, in common cases, would conclude thus. For what would such a conclusion really amount to but this, that evidence confuted by contrary evidence, or any way overbalanced, destroys the credibility of other evidence, neither confuted nor overbalanced? To argue, that because there is, if there were, like evidence from testimony, for miracles acknowledged false, as for those in attestation of Christianity, therefore the evidence in the latter case is not to be credited; *this is the same as to argue, that if two men of equally good reputation had given evidence in different cases no way connected, and one of them had been convicted of perjury, this confuted the testimony of the other.*

Upon the whole, then, the general observation that human creatures are so liable to be deceived, from enthusiasm in religion, and principles equi-

valent to enthusiasm in common matters, and in both from negligence; and that they are so capable of dishonestly endeavouring to deceive others; this does indeed weaken the evidence of testimony in all cases, but does not destroy it in any. And these things will appear to different men to weaken the evidence of testimony in different degrees; in degrees proportionable to the observations they have made, or the notions they have any way taken up, concerning the weakness, and negligence, and dishonesty of mankind; or concerning the powers of enthusiasm, and prejudices equivalent to it. But it seems to me, that people do not know what they say, who affirm these things to destroy the evidence from testimony, which we have of the truth of Christianity. Nothing can destroy the evidence of testimony in any case, but a proof or probability, that persons are not competent judges of the facts to which they give testimony; or that they are actually under some indirect influence in giving it, in such particular case. Till this be made out, the *natural* laws of human actions require that testimony be admitted. It can never be sufficient to overthrow direct

historical evidence, indolently to say, that there are so many principles, from whence men are liable to be deceived themselves and disposed to deceive others, especially in matters of religion, that one knows not what to believe.* And it is surprising persons can help reflecting, that this very manner of speaking supposes, they are not satisfied that there is nothing in the evidence, of which they speak thus; or that they can avoid observing, if they do make this reflection, that it is, on such a subject, a very material one.

And over against all these objections, is to be set the importance of Christianity, as what must have engaged the attention of its first converts, so as to have rendered them less liable to be deceived from carelessness, than they would in common matters; and likewise the strong obli-

* The extreme inconsistency of such a mode of argumentation, is now generally seen, and Hume's ingenious but ridiculous sophistry on this point is seldom heard of. Apart from all the other arguments by which such a mode of reasoning is proved absurd, the following well-known quotation unmasks the fallacy, to the comprehension even of a child. (See Appendix, iv.).

gations to veracity, which their religion laid them under: so that the first and most obvious presumption is, that they could not be deceived themselves, nor would deceive others. And this presumption, in this degree, is peculiar to the testimony we have been considering.*

In argument, assertions are nothing in themselves, and have an air of positiveness, which sometimes is not very easy: yet they are necessary, and necessary to be repeated, in order to connect a discourse, and distinctly to lay before the view of the reader, what is proposed to be proved, and what is left as proved. Now, the conclusion from the foregoing observations is, I think, beyond all doubt this: that unbelievers must be forced to admit the external evidence for Christianity, that is, the proof of miracles wrought to attest it, to be of real weight and very considerable; though they cannot allow it to be sufficient, to convince them of the reality

* “There is no assignable character which will account for the conduct of the apostles, supposing their story to be false. If *bad men*, what could have induced them to take such
 \ promote virtue? If *good men*, they would not have
 ut the country with a string of lies in their mouths.”

of those miracles. And as they must, in all reason, admit this, so it seems to me, that upon consideration they would, in fact, admit it; those of them, I mean, who know any thing at all of the matter: in like manner as persons, in many cases, own, they see strong evidence from testimony, for the truth of things, which yet they cannot be convinced are true; cases, suppose, where there is contrary testimony, or things which they think, whether with or without reason, to be credible. But there is no testimony contrary to that which we have been considering; and it has been fully proved, that there is no incredibility in Christianity in general, or in any part of it.

II. As to the evidence for Christianity from *prophecy*,* I shall only make some few general

* “ Without reference to any of those numerous and much varying hypotheses at present urged on the subject of unfulfilled prophecy; or to those prophecies which have, long since, received their accomplishment, the reader is earnestly recommended to procure and read Mr. Keith’s recent little volume, ‘ *On the Evidence afforded to Christianity by the discoveries of modern travellers.* ’ ”—Waugh and Innes, Edinburgh.

Keith follows in the same tract with Bishop Newton; only, with the advantage of that work before him as an example, and more experience and recent discovery to aid

observations, which are suggested by the analogy of nature; that is, by the acknowledged natural rules of judging in common matters concerning evidence of a like kind to this from prophecy.

1. The obscurity or unintelligibleness of one part of a prophecy, does not in any degree, invalidate the proof of foresight, arising from the appearing completion of those other parts which are understood. For the case is evidently the same, as if those parts which are not understood, were lost, or not written at all, or written in an unknown tongue. Whether this observation be commonly attended to or not, it is so evident, that one can scarce bring one's self to set down an instance in common matters, to exemplify it. However, suppose a writing, partly in cypher, and partly in plain words at length, and that in

him. The illustration of this branch of the Christian Evidence occupied much of the time and labour of that greatest of philosophers and humblest of Christians, the immortal *Sir Isaac Newton*, as well as that of his more modern namesake. And at this time, that great man's chronological interpretation of the 11th Chapter of the Prophecy of Daniel in particular, will be read with a peculiar interest.

See "Observations on the Prophecy of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John, by *Sir Isaac Newton*. Part I. chapter 12.

the part one understood, there appeared mention of several known facts; it would never come into any man's thoughts to imagine, that if he understood the whole, perhaps he might find, that those facts were not in reality known by the writer. Indeed, both in this example, and the thing intended to be exemplified by it, our not understanding the whole (the whole, suppose, of a sentence or a paragraph) might sometimes occasion a doubt, whether one understood the literal meaning of such a part; but this comes under another consideration.

For the same reason, though a man should be incapable, for want of learning, or opportunities of inquiry, or from not having turned his studies this way, even so much as to judge, whether particular prophecies have been throughout completely fulfilled; yet he may see, in general, that they have been fulfilled to such a degree, as, upon very good ground, to be convinced of foresight more than human in such prophecies, and of such events being intended by them. For the same reason also, though by means of the deficiencies in civil history, and the different accounts of historians, the most learned should

not be able to make out to satisfaction, that such parts of the prophetic history have been minutely and throughout fulfilled; yet, a very strong proof of foresight may arise, from that general completion of them which is made out: as much proof of foresight, perhaps, as the Giver of prophecy intended should ever be afforded by such parts of prophecy.

2. A long series of prophecy being applicable to such and such events, is itself a proof, that it was intended of them; as the rules by which we naturally judge and determine, in common cases parallel to this, will shew. This observation I make in answer to the common objection against the application of the prophecies, that considering each of them distinctly by itself, it does not at all appear, that they were intended of those particular events to which they are applied by Christians; and therefore it is to be supposed, that, if they meant any thing, they were intended of other events unknown to us, and not of these at all.

Now, there are two kinds of writing, which bear a great resemblance to prophecy, with respect to the matter before us; the mythological

and the satirical, where the satire is, to a certain degree, concealed. And a man might be assured, that he understood what an author intended by a fable or parable, related without any application or moral, merely from seeing it to be easily capable of such application, and that such a moral might naturally be deduced from it. And he might be fully assured, that such persons and events were intended in a satirical writing, merely from its being applicable to them. And, agreeably to the last observation, he might be in a good measure satisfied of it, though he were not enough informed in affairs or in the story of such persons, to understand half the satire. For, his satisfaction, that he understood the meaning, the intended meaning, of these writings, would be greater or less, in proportion as he saw the general turn of them to be capable of such application, and in proportion to the number of particular things capable of it. And thus, if a long series of prophecy is applicable to the present state of the church, and to the political situations of the kingdoms of the world, some thousand years after these prophecies were delivered, and a long series of

prophecy delivered before the coming of Christ is applicable to him; these things are in themselves a proof, that the prophetic history was intended of him, and of those events; in proportion as the general turn of it is capable of such application, and to the number and variety of particular prophecies capable of it. And, though in all just way of consideration, the appearing completion of prophecies is to be allowed to be thus explanatory of, and to determine their meaning; yet it is to be remembered farther, that the ancient Jews applied the prophecies to a Messiah before his coming, in much the same manner as Christians do now; and that the primitive Christians interpreted the prophecies respecting the state of the church and of the world, in the last ages, in the sense which the event seems to confirm and verify. And from these things it may be made to appear,

3. That the shewing, even to a high probability, if that could be, that the prophets thought of some other events, in such and such predictions, and not those at all which Christians allege to be completions of those predictions;

or that such and such prophecies are capable of being applied to other events than those to which Christians apply them—that this would not confute or destroy the force of the argument from prophecy, even with regard to those very instances. For, observe how this matter really is. If one knew such a person to be the sole author of such a book, and was certainly assured, or satisfied to any degree, that one knew the whole of what he intended in it, one should be assured, or satisfied to such a degree, that one knew the whole meaning of that book; for the meaning of a book is nothing but the meaning of the author. But if one knew a person to have compiled a book out of memoirs, which he received from another, of vastly superior knowledge in the subject of it, especially if it were a book full of great intricacies and difficulties, it would in nowise follow, that one knew the whole meaning of the book, from knowing the whole meaning of the compiler; for the original memoirs, that is, the author of them, might have, and there would be no degree of presumption, in many cases, against supposing him to have, some farther meaning, than the

compiler saw. To say, then, that the Scriptures and the things contained in them can have no other or farther meaning, than those persons thought or had, who first recited or wrote them, is evidently saying, that those persons were the original, proper, and sole authors of those books, that is, that they are not inspired ; which is absurd, whilst the authority of these books is under examination, that is, till you have determined, they are of no divine authority at all. Till this be determined, it must in all reason be supposed, not indeed that they have, for this is taking for granted that they are inspired, but that they may have some farther meaning than what the compilers saw or understood. And, upon this supposition, it is supposable also, that this farther meaning may be fulfilled. Now, events corresponding to prophecies, interpreted in a different meaning from that in which the prophets are supposed to have understood them ; this affords, in a manner, the same proof that this different sense was originally intended, as it would have afforded, if the prophets had not understood their predictions in the sense it is supposed they did ; because there is no presump-

tion of their sense of them being the whole sense of them. And it has been already shewn, that the apparent completions of prophecy must be allowed to be explanatory of its meaning. So that the question is, whether a series of prophecy has been fulfilled, in a natural or proper, that is, in any real, sense of the words of it. For such completion is equally a proof of foresight more than human, whether the prophets are, or are not, supposed to have understood it in a different sense. I say, supposed; for though I think it clear, that the prophets did not understand the full meaning of their predictions, it is another question, how far they thought they did, and in what sense they understood them.

Hence may be seen, to how little purpose those persons busy themselves, who endeavour to prove that the prophetic history is applicable to events of the age in which it was written, or of ages before it. Indeed, to have proved this before there was any appearance of a further completion of it, might have answered some purpose; for it might have prevented the expectation of any such farther completion. Thus, could Porphyry have shewn, that some prin-

cipal parts of the book of Daniel, for instance, the seventh verse of the seventh chapter, which the Christians interpreted of the latter ages, was applicable to events which happened before or about the age of Antiochus Epiphanes; this might have prevented them from expecting any farther completion of it. And unless there was then, as I think there must have been, external evidence concerning that book, more than is come down to us, such a discovery might have been a stumbling-block in the way of Christianity itself; considering the authority which our Saviour has given to the book of Daniel, and how much the general scheme of Christianity presupposes the truth of it. But even this discovery, had there been any such,* would be of very little weight with reasonable men

* It appears, that Porphyry did nothing worth mentioning in this way. For Jerome on the place says: *Duas posteriores bestias—in uno Macedonum regno ponit.* And as to the ten kings: *Decem reges enumerat, qui, fuerunt scvissimi; ipsesque reges non unius ponit regni, verbi gratia, Macedonia, Syria, Asia, et Egypti; sed de diversis regnis unum efficit regum ordinem.* And in this way of interpretation, any thing may be made of any thing.

now; if this passage, thus applicable to events before the age of Porphyry, appears to be applicable also to events which succeeded the dissolution of the Roman empire. I mention this, not at all as intending to insinuate, that the division of this empire into ten parts, for it was plainly divided into about that number, were, alone, and by itself, of any moment in verifying the prophetic history; but only as an example of the thing I am speaking of. And thus, upon the whole, the matter of enquiry evidently must be, as above put, Whether the prophecies are applicable to Christ, and to the present state of the world and of the church; applicable in such a degree, as to imply foresight: not whether they are capable of any other application; though I know no pretence for saying, the general turn of them is capable of any other.

These observations are, I think, just, and the evidence referred to in them, real; though there may be people who will not accept of such imperfect information from Scripture. Some too have not integrity and regard enough to truth, to attend to evidence, which keeps the mind in doubt, perhaps perplexity, and which is

much of a different sort from what they expected. And it plainly requires a degree of modesty and fairness, beyond what every one has, for a man to say, not to the world, but to himself, that there is a real appearance of somewhat of great weight in this matter, though he is not able thoroughly to satisfy himself about it ; but it shall have its influence upon him, in proportion to its appearing reality and weight. It is much more easy, and more falls in with the negligence, presumption, and wilfulness of the generality, to determine at once, with a decisive air, there is nothing in it. The prejudices arising from that absolute contempt and scorn, with which this evidence is treated in the world, I do not mention. For what indeed can be said to persons, who are weak enough in their understandings to think this any presumption against it ; or, if they do not, are yet weak enough in their temper to be influenced by such prejudices, upon such a subject.

II. *I shall now, secondly, Endeavour to give some account of the general argument for the truth of Christianity, consisting both of the direct and circumstantial evidence, considered as making up*

one argument. Indeed, to state and examine this argument fully, would be a work much beyond the compass of this whole treatise; nor is so much as a proper abridgment of it to be expected here. Yet the present subject requires to have some brief account of it given. For it is the kind of evidence upon which most questions of difficulty, in common practice, are determined; evidence arising from various coincidences, which support and confirm each other, and in this manner prove, with more or less certainty, the point under consideration. And I choose to do it also, *first*, Because it seems to be of the greatest importance, and not duly attended to by every one, that the proof of revelation is, not some direct and express things only, but a great variety of circumstantial things also; and that though each of these direct and circumstantial things is indeed to be considered separately, yet they are afterwards to be joined together; for that the proper force of the evidence consists in the result of those several things, considered in their respects to each other, and united into one view; and, in the *next* place, Because it seems to me, that the

matters of facts here set down, which are acknowledged by unbelievers, must be acknowledged by them also to contain together a degree of evidence of great weight, if they could be brought to lay these several things before themselves distinctly, and then with attention consider them together; instead of that cursory thought of them, to which we are familiarized. For being familiarized to the cursory thought of things, as really hinders the weight of them from being seen, as from having its due influence upon practice.

The thing asserted, and the truth of which is to be enquired into, is this: that over and above our reason and affections, which God has given us for the information of our judgment and the conduct of our lives, he has also, by external revelation, given us an account of himself and his moral government over the world, implying a future state of rewards and punishments; that is, hath revealed the system of natural religion; for natural religion may be externally revealed by God, as the ignorant may be taught it by mankind, their fellow-creatures;—that God, I say, has given us the evidence of revelation, as

well as the evidence of reason, to ascertain this moral system ; together with an account of a particular dispensation of Providence, which reason could no way have discovered, and a particular institution of religion founded on it, for the recovery of mankind out of their present wretched condition, and raising them to the perfection and final happiness of their nature.

This revelation, whether real or supposed, may be considered as wholly historical. For prophecy is nothing but the history of events before they come to pass : doctrines also are matters of fact : and precepts come under the same notion. And the general design of Scripture, which contains in it this revelation, thus considered as historical, may be said to be, to give us an account of the world, in this one single view, as God's world ; by which it appears essentially distinguished from all other books, so far as I have found, except such as are copied from it. *It begins* with an account of God's creation of the world, in order to ascertain and distinguish from all others, who is the object of our worship, by what he has done ; in order to ascertain who he is, concerning whose

providence, commands, promises, and threatenings, this sacred book all along treats; the Maker and Proprietor of the world, he whose creatures we are, the God of nature: in order likewise to distinguish him from the idols of the nations, which are either imaginary beings, that is, no beings at all; or else part of that creation, the historical relation of which is here given. And St. John, not improbably with an eye to this Mosaic account of the creation, begins his gospel with an account of our Saviour's pre-existence, and that "all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made;" agreeably to the doctrine of St. Paul, that "God created all things by Jesus Christ." This being premised, the Scripture, taken together, seems to profess to contain a kind of an abridgment of the history of the world, in the view just now mentioned; that is, a general account of the condition of religion and its professors, during the continuance of that apostacy from God, and state of wickedness, which it every where supposes the world to lie in. And this account of the state of religion carries with it some brief account

of the political state of things, as religion is affected by it. Revelation, indeed, considers the common affairs of this world, and what is going on in it, as a mere scene of distraction, and cannot be supposed to concern itself with foretelling at what time Rome, or Babylon, or Greece, or any particular place, should be the most conspicuous seat of that tyranny and dissoluteness, which all places equally aspire to be; cannot, I say, be supposed to give an account of this wild scene for its own sake. But it seems to contain some very general account of the chief governments of the world, as the general state of religion has been, is, or shall be, affected by them, from the first transgression, and during the whole interval of the world's continuing in its present state, to a certain future period, spoken of both in the Old and New Testament, very distinctly, and in great variety of expression: "The times of the restitution of all things:" when "the mystery of God shall be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets;" when "the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to

other people," as it is represented to be during this apostacy, but "judgment shall be given to the saints,"* and "they shall reign;"† "and the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High."‡

Upon this general view of the Scripture, I would remark, how great a length of time the whole relation takes up, near six thousand years of which are past: and how great a variety of things it treats of; the natural and moral system or history of the world, including the time when it was formed, all contained in the very first book, and evidently written in a rude and unlearned age; and in subsequent books, the various common and prophetic history, and the particular dispensation of Christianity. Now, all this together gives the largest scope for criticism; and for confutation of what is capable of being confuted, either from reason, or from common history, or from any inconsistency in its several parts. And it is a thing which deserves, I think, to be mentioned, that whereas some

* Dan. vii. 22.

† Rev.

‡ Dan. vii.

imagine, the supposed doubtfulness of the evidence for revelation implies a positive argument that it is not true; it appears, on the contrary, to imply a positive argument that it is true. For, could any common relation, of such antiquity, extent, and variety, (for in these things the stress of what I am now observing lies), be proposed to the examination of the world; that it could not, in any age of knowledge and liberty, be confuted, or shewn to have nothing in it, to the satisfaction of reasonable men; this would be thought a strong presumptive proof of its truth. And indeed, it must be a proof of it, just in proportion to the probability, that if it were false, it might be shewn to be so; and this, I think, is scarce pretended to be shewn, but upon principles and in ways of arguing which have been clearly obviated. Nor does it at all appear, that any set of men who believe natural religion, are of the opinion, that Christianity has been thus confuted. But to proceed:

Together with the moral system of the world, the Old Testament contains a chronological account of the beginning of it, and from thence, an unbroken genealogy of mankind for many

ages before common history begins ; and carried on as much farther, as to make up a continued thread of history, of the length of between three and four thousand years. It contains an account of God's making a covenant with a particular nation, that they should be his people, and he would be their God, in a peculiar sense ; of his often interposing miraculously in their affairs ; giving them the promise, and, long after, the possession, of a particular country ; assuring them of the greatest national prosperity in it, if they would worship him, in opposition to the idols which the rest of the world worshipped, and obey his commands, and threatening them with unexampled punishments, if they disobeyed him, and fell into the general idolatry ; inso-much, that this one nation should continue to be the observation and the wonder of all the world. It declares particularly, that " God would scatter them among all people, from one end of the earth unto the other ;" but that " when they should return unto the Lord their God, he would have compassion upon them, and gather them, from all the nations whither he had scattered them : that " Israel should be saved

in the Lord, with an everlasting salvation, and not be ashamed or confounded, world without end." And as some of those promises are conditional, others are as absolute as any thing can be expressed, that the time should come, when "the people should be all righteous, and inherit the land for ever;" that "though God would make a full end of all nations whither he had scattered them, yet would he not make a full end of them:" that "he would bring again the captivity of his people Israel, and plant them upon their land, and they should be no more pulled out of their land:" that "the seed of Israel should not cease from being a nation for ever."* It foretels, that God would raise them up a particular person, in whom all his promises should finally be fulfilled: the Messiah, who should be, in a high and eminent sense, their anointed Prince and Saviour. This was foretold in such a manner, as raised a general expectation of such a person in the nation, as appears from the New Testament, and is an acknowledged fact; an expectation of his coming

* Deut. xxviii. 64. Ch. xxx. 2, 3. Isa. xlv. 17. Ch. lx. 21. Jer. xxx. 11. Ch. xlv. 28. Amos ix. 15. Jer. xxxi. 36.

at such a particular time, before any one appeared, claiming to be that person, and when there was no ground for such an expectation but from the prophecies; which expectation, therefore, must in all reason be presumed to be explanatory of those prophecies, if there were any doubt about their meaning. It seems moreover to foretel, that this person should be rejected by that nation, to whom he had been so long promised, and though he was so much desired by them.* And it expressly foretels, that he should be the Saviour of the Gentiles; and even that the completion of the scheme contained in this book, and then begun and in its progress, should be somewhat so great, that, in comparison with it, the restoration of the Jews alone would be but of small account: "It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be for salvation unto the end of the earth." And, "In the last days, the mountain of the

* Isa. viii. 14, 15. Ch. xlix. 5. Ch. liii. Mal. i. 10, 11. and Ch. iii.

Lord's house should be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it—for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations—and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day, and the idols he shall utterly abolish.”* The Scripture farther contains an account, that at the time the Messiah was expected, a person rose up, in this nation, claiming to be that Messiah, to be the person whom all the prophecies referred to, and in whom they should centre; that he spent some years in a continued course of miraculous works, and endued his immediate disciples and followers with a power of doing the same, as a proof of the truth of that religion which he commissioned them to publish; that, invested with this authority and power, they made numerous converts in the remotest countries, and settled

* Isa. xlix. 6. Ch. ii. Ch. xi. Ch. lvi. 7. Mal. i. 11. To which must be added, the other prophecies of the like kind, several in the New Testament, and very many in the Old, which describe what shall be the completion of the revealed plan of Providence.

and established his religion in the world ; to the end of which, the Scripture professes to give a prophetic account of the state of this religion amongst mankind.

Let us now suppose a person utterly ignorant of history, to have all this related to him, out of the Scripture. Or, suppose such a one having the Scripture put into his hands, to remark these things in it, not knowing but that the whole, even its civil history, as well as the other parts of it, might be, from beginning to end, an entire invention ; and to ask, What truth was in it, and whether the revelation here related was real, or a fiction ? And, instead of a direct answer, suppose him, all at once, to be told the following confessed facts ; and then to unite them into one view.

Let him first be told, in how great a degree the profession and establishment of natural religion, the belief that there is one God to be worshipped, that virtue is his law, and that mankind shall be rewarded and punished hereafter, as they obey and disobey it here ; in how very great a degree, I say, the profession and establishment of this moral system in the world, is owing to the reve-

lation, whether real or supposed, contained in this book :* the establishment of this moral system, even in those countries which do not acknowledge the proper authority of the Scripture. Let him be told also, what number of nations do acknowledge its proper authority. Let him then take in the consideration, of what importance religion is to mankind. And upon these things, he might, I think, truly observe, that this supposed revelation obtaining and being received in the world, with all the circumstances and effects of it, considered together as one event, is the most conspicuous and important event in the story of mankind : that a book of this nature, and thus promulged and recommended to our consideration, demands, as if by a voice from heaven, to have its claims most seriously examined into ; and that, before such examination, to treat it with any kind of scoffing

* "If a map could trace the real influence of the Gospel, it would also delineate the proportion of intelligence and active virtue. The measure of spiritual ignorance and of spiritual knowledge, is also the measure of barbarism and of civilization, of mental stupidity, or mental illumination."—*Sumner's Evidence*, p. 411.

and ridicule, is an offence against natural piety. But it is to be remembered, that how much soever the establishment of natural religion in the world is owing to the Scripture revelation; this does not destroy the proof of religion from reason; any more than the proof of *Euclid's Elements* is destroyed, by a man's knowing or thinking, that he should never have seen the truth of the several propositions contained in it, nor had those propositions come into his thoughts, but for that mathematician.

Let such a person as we are speaking of, be, in the next place, informed of the acknowledged antiquity of the first parts of this book; and that its chronology, its account of the time when the earth, and the several parts of it, were first peopled with human creatures, is no way contradicted, but is really confirmed, by the natural and civil history of the world collected from common historians, from the state of the earth, and from the late invention of arts and sciences. And, as the Scripture contains an unbroken thread of common and civil history, from the creation to the captivity, for between three and four thousand years; let the person

we are speaking of be told, in the next place, that this general history, as it is not contradicted, but is confirmed by profane history,* as much as there would be reason to expect, upon supposition of its truth ; so there is nothing in the whole history itself to give any reasonable ground of suspicion of its not being, in the general, a faithful and literally true genealogy of men, and series of things. I speak here only of the common Scripture history, or of the course of ordinary events related in it, as distinguished from miracles, and from the prophetic history. In all the Scripture narrations of this kind, following events arise out of foregoing ones, as in all other histories. There appears nothing related as done in any age, nor conformable to the manners of that age ; nothing in the account of a succeeding age, which

* See *Horne's* Introduction to Critical Study, and Knowledge of the Scriptures. The 1st vol. (especially chap. iii. sec. 2).

Faber's *Horæ Mosaicæ*.

Hale's Analysis of Chronology.

Sumner's Records of the Creation.

Stillington's—Notes to *D'Oyly* and *Mant's* Bible, &c.

one would say could not be true, or was improbable, from the account of things in the preceding one. There is nothing in the characters which would raise a thought of their being feigned; but all the internal marks imaginable of their being real. It is to be added also, that mere genealogies, bare narratives of the number of years which persons called by such and such names lived, do not carry the face of fiction; perhaps do carry some presumption of veracity; and all unadorned narratives, which have nothing to surprise, may be thought to carry somewhat of the like presumption too. And the domestic and the political history is plainly credible. There may be incidents in Scripture, which, taken alone in the naked way they are told, may appear strange, especially to persons of other manners, temper, education; but there are also incidents of undoubted truth, in many of most persons' lives, which, in the same circumstances, would appear to the full as strange. There may be mistakes of transcribers, there may be other real or seeming mistakes, not easy to be particularly accounted for; but there are certainly no more things of this kind in the

Scripture, than what were to have been expected in books of such antiquity ; and nothing, in any wise, sufficient to discredit the general narrative. Now, that a history, claiming to commence from the creation, and extending in one continued series, through so great a length of time, and variety of events, should have such appearances of reality and truth in its whole contexture, is surely a very remarkable circumstance in its favour. And as all this is applicable to the common history of the New Testament, so there is a farther credibility, and a very high one, given to it by profane authors ; many of these writing of the same times, and confirming the truth of customs and events, which are incidentally, as well as more purposely mentioned in it. And this credibility of the common Scripture history gives some credibility to its miraculous history : especially as this is interwoven with the common, so as that they imply each other, and both together make up one relation.

Let it then be more particularly observed to this person, that it is an acknowledged matter of fact, which is indeed implied in the foregoing

observation, that there was such a nation as the Jews, of the greatest antiquity, whose government and general polity was founded on the law, here related to be given them by Moses as from heaven : that natural religion, though with rites additional, yet no way contrary to it, was their established religion, which cannot be said of the Gentile world ; and that their very being, as a nation, depended upon their acknowledgment of one God, the God of the universe. For suppose, in their captivity in Babylon, they had gone over to the religion of their conquerors, there would have remained no bond of union, to keep them a distinct people. And whilst they were under their own kings in their own country, a total apostasy from God would have been the dissolution of their whole government. They, in such a sense, nationally acknowledged and worshipped the Maker of heaven and earth, when the rest of the world were sunk in idolatry, as rendered them, in fact, the peculiar people of God. And this, so remarkable an establishment and preservation of natural religion amongst them, seems to add some peculiar credibility to the historical evidence for the

miracles of Moses and the prophets; because these miracles are a full, satisfactory account of this event, which plainly wants to be accounted for, and cannot otherwise.

Let this person, supposed wholly ignorant of history, be acquainted farther, that one claiming to be the Messiah, of Jewish extraction, rose up at the time when this nation, from the prophecies abovementioned, expected the Messiah: that he was rejected, as it seemed to have been foretold he should, by the body of the people, under the direction of their rulers: that in the course of a very few years he was believed on, and acknowledged as the promised Messiah, by great numbers among the Gentiles, agreeable to the prophecies of Scripture, yet not upon the evidence of prophecy, but of miracles, of which miracles we also have strong historical evidence; (by which I mean here no more than must be acknowledged by unbelievers; for let pious frauds and follies be admitted to weaken, it is absurd to say they destroy, our evidence of miracles wrought in proof of Christianity;*) that

* Pages 72, 73.

this religion approving itself to the reason of mankind, and carrying its own evidence with it, so far as reason is a judge of its system, and being no way contrary to reason in those parts of it which require to be believed upon the mere authority of its author; that this religion, I say, gradually spread and supported itself, for some hundred years, not only without any assistance from temporal power, but under constant discouragements, and often the bitterest persecutions from it, and then became the religion of the world: that in the mean time, the Jewish nation and government were destroyed in a very remarkable manner, and the people carried away captive and dispersed through the most distant countries; in which state of dispersion they have remained fifteen hundred years: and that they remain a numerous people, united amongst themselves, and distinguished from the rest of the world, as they were in the days of Moses, by the profession of his law; and every where looked upon in a manner, which one scarce knows how distinctly to express, but in the words of the prophetic account of it, given so many ages before it came to pass: "Thou shalt

become an astonishment, a proverb and a by-word, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee."*†

The appearance of a standing miracle, in the Jews remaining a distinct people in their dispersion, and the confirmation which this event appears to give to the truth of revelation, may be thought to be answered by their religion forbidding them intermarriages with those of any other, and prescribing them a great many peculiarities in their food, by which they are debarred from the means of incorporating with the people in whose countries they live. This is not, I think, a satisfactory account of that which it pretends to account for. But what does it pretend to account for? The correspondence between this event and the prophecies; or the

* Deut, xxviii. 37.

† "Bred, as I have been, to the consideration of evidence, I consider the prophecy concerning the destruction of the Jewish nation, if there was nothing else to support Christianity, absolutely irresistible," &c.—*Late Lord Erskine's Speech*, 24th June, 1797.

See the remainder of this branch of this truly forcible and eloquent appeal. There is also a good paper in the *Spectator*, on the evidence afforded to Christianity by the present appearance of the Jews.

coincidence of both, with a long dispensation of Providence of a peculiar nature, towards that people formerly? No. It is only the event itself which is offered to be thus accounted for; which single event taken alone, abstracted from all such correspondence and coincidence, perhaps would not have appeared miraculous; but that correspondence and coincidence may be so, though the event itself be supposed not. Thus, the concurrence of our Saviour being born at Bethlehem, with a long foregoing series of prophecy, and other coincidences, is doubtless miraculous—the series of prophecy and other coincidences, and the event being admitted: though the event itself, his birth at that place, appears to have been brought about in a natural way; of which, however, no one can be certain.

And as several of these events seem, in some degree expressly, to have verified the prophetic history already; so likewise, they may be considered farther, as having a peculiar aspect towards the full completion of it; as affording some presumption that the whole of it shall one time or other be fulfilled. Thus, that the Jews have been so wonderfully preserved in their

long and wide dispersion ; which is indeed the direct fulfilling of some prophecies, but is now mentioned only as looking forward to somewhat yet to come ; that natural religion come forth from Judea, and spread in the degree it has done over the world, before lost in idolatry ; which, together with some other things, have distinguished that very place, in like manner as the people of it are distinguished : that this great change of religion over the earth was brought about under the profession and acknowledgment, that Jesus was the promised Messiah : things of this kind naturally turn the thoughts of serious men towards the full completion of the prophetic history, concerning the final restoration of that people ; concerning the establishment of the everlasting kingdom among them, the kingdom of the Messiah ; and the future state of the world, under this sacred government. Such circumstances and events compared with these prophecies, though no completions of them, yet would not, I think, be spoken of as nothing in the argument, by a person upon his first being informed of them. They fall in with the prophetic history of things

still future, give it some additional credibility, have the appearance of being somewhat in order to the full completion of it.

Indeed, it requires a good degree of knowledge, and great calmness and consideration, to be able to judge thoroughly of the evidence for the truth of Christianity, from that part of the prophetic history which relates to the situation of the kingdoms of the world, and to the state of the church, from the establishment of Christianity to the present time. But it appears, from a general view of it, to be very material. And those persons who have thoroughly examined it, and some of them were men of the coolest tempers, greatest capacities, and least liable to imputations of prejudice, insist upon it as determinately conclusive.

Suppose now a person quite ignorant of history, first to recollect the passages above mentioned out of Scripture without knowing but what the whole was a late fiction, then to be informed of the correspondent facts now mentioned, and to unite them all into one view: that the profession and establishment of natural religion in the world, is greatly owing, in dif-

ferent ways, to this book, and the supposed revelation which it contains; that it is acknowledged to be of the earliest antiquity; that its chronology and common history are entirely credible; that this ancient nation, the Jews, of whom it chiefly treats, appear to have been, in fact, the people of God, in a distinguished sense; that, as there was a national expectation amongst them, raised from the prophecies, of a Messiah to appear at such a time, so one at this time appeared claiming to be that Messiah; that he was rejected by this nation, but received by the Gentiles, not upon the evidence of prophecy, but of miracles; that the religion he taught supported itself under the greatest difficulties, gained ground, and at length became the religion of the world; that in the mean time, the Jewish polity was utterly destroyed, and the nation dispersed over the face of the earth; that, notwithstanding this, they have remained a distinct and numerous people for so many centuries, even to this day; which not only appears to be the express completion of several prophecies concerning them, but also renders it, as one may speak, a visible and easy

possibility, that the promises made to them as a nation, may yet be fulfilled. And to these acknowledged truths, let the person we have been supposing add, as I think he ought, whether every one will allow it or not, the obvious appearances which there are of the state of the world, in other respects besides what relates to the Jews, and of the Christian church, having so long answered, and still answering to the prophetic history. Suppose, I say, these facts set over against the things before-mentioned out of the Scripture, and seriously compared with them; the joint view of both together, must, I think, appear of very great weight to a considerate reasonable person; of much greater, indeed, upon having them first laid before him, than is easy for us, who are so familiarized to them, to conceive, without some particular attention for that purpose.*

* "I will not say, that in a subject strictly intellectual, and in science properly so called, a demonstration is the less convincing for being old: but I am not sure that this is not in some measure true of moral *evidence* and *probable truth*. In practical subjects, however, where two things are to be done, the understanding to be convinced, and the will to be persuaded, I believe that the force of every argu-

All these things, and the several particulars contained under them, require to be distinctly and most thoroughly examined into; that the weight of each may be judged of, upon such examination, and such conclusion drawn as results from their united force. But this has not been attempted here. I have gone no farther than to shew, that the general imperfect view of them now given, the confessed historical evidence for miracles, and the many obvious appearing completions of prophecy, together with the collateral things * here mentioned, and there are several others of the like sort; that all this together, which, being fact, must be acknowledged by unbelievers, amounts to real evidence of somewhat more than human in this matter; evidence much more important than careless men, who have been accustomed only to tran-

ment is diminished by triteness and familiarity. The intrinsic value of the argument must be the same: the impression may be very different."—Sermon before the University of Cambridge, by *Archdeacon Paley*.

* All the particular things mentioned in this Chapter, not reducible to the head of certain miracles, or determinate completions of prophecy.

sient and partial views of it, can imagine; and indeed abundantly sufficient to act upon. And these things, I apprehend, must be acknowledged by unbelievers. For, though they may say, that the historical evidence of miracles, wrought in attestation of Christianity, is not sufficient to convince them that such miracles were really wrought, they cannot deny that there is such historical evidence, it being a known matter of fact that there is. They may say, the conformity between the prophecies and events is by accident; but there are many instances in which such conformity itself cannot be denied. They may say, with regard to such kind of collateral things as those above mentioned, that any odd accidental events, without meaning, will have a meaning found in them by fanciful people; and that such as are fanciful in any one certain way, will make out a thousand coincidences, which seem to favour their peculiar follies. Men, I say, may talk thus; but no one who is serious, can possibly think these things to be nothing, if he considers the importance of collateral things, and even of lesser circumstances, in the evidence of probability.

as distinguished, in nature, from the evidence of demonstration.* In many cases, indeed, it seems to require the truest judgment, to determine with exactness the weight of circumstantial evidence; but it is very often altogether as convincing as that which is the most express and direct.

This general view of the evidence for Christianity, considered as making one argument, may also serve to recommend to serious persons, to set down every thing which they think may be of any real weight at all in proof of it, and particularly the many seeming completions of prophecy; and they will find, that, judging by the natural rules by which we judge of probable evidence in common matters, they amount to a much higher degree of proof, upon such a joint

* “The word *probable* when applied to evidence of this nature does not imply any deficiency in the proof, but only marks the particular nature of that proof, as contra-distinguished from other species of evidence. It is opposed *not to what is certain, but, to what admits of being demonstrated after the manner of mathematicians.*”—*Dugald Stewart on the Mind*, vol. ii. chap. iv. sec. 4.

“To us, probability is the very guide of life.”—*Introduction to Analogy*.

review, than could be supposed upon considering them separately, at different times, how strong soever the proof might before appear to them, upon such separate views of it. For probable proofs, by being added, not only increase the evidence, but multiply it. Nor should I dissuade any one from setting down what he thought made for the contrary side. But then it is to be remembered, not in order to influence his judgment, but his practice, that a mistake on one side may be, in its consequences, much more dangerous than a mistake on the other. And what course is most safe, and what most dangerous, is a consideration thought very material, when we deliberate, not concerning events, but concerning conduct in our temporal affairs. To be influenced by this consideration in our judgment, to believe or disbelieve upon it, is indeed as much prejudice as any thing whatever. And, like other prejudices, it operates contrary ways in different men. For some are inclined to believe what they hope; and others what they fear. And it is manifest unreasonableness, to apply to men's passions, in order to gain their assent. But in deliberations concern-

ing conduct, there is nothing which reason more requires to be taken into the account, than the importance of it. For, suppose it doubtful what would be the consequence of acting in this, or in a contrary manner; still, that taking one side could be attended with little or no bad consequences,* and taking the other might be attended with the greatest, must appear to unprejudiced reason, of the highest moment towards determining how we are to act. But the truth of our religion, like the truth of common matters, is to be judged of by all the evidence taken together. And unless the whole series of things which may be alleged in this argument, and every particular thing in it, can reasonably be supposed to have been by accident (for here the stress of the argument for Christianity lies,) then is the truth of it proved: in like manner, as if

* "Indisputably the firm believers in the Gospel have a great advantage over all others; for this simple reason, that, if true, they will have their reward hereafter; and if there be no hereafter, they can be but with the infidel in his eternal sleep, having had the assistance of an exalted hope through life, without subsequent disappointment, since (at the worst or them) out of nothing nothing can arise, not even sorrow."

—*Lord Byron's Letter to Shepherd, Dec. 1821.*

in any common case, numerous events acknowledged, were to be alleged in proof of any other event disputed ; the truth of the disputed event would be proved, not only if any one of the acknowledged ones did of itself clearly imply it, but though no one of them singly did so, if the whole of the acknowledged events taken together, could not in reason be supposed to have happened, unless the disputed one were true.

It is obvious, how much advantage the nature of this evidence gives to those persons who attack Christianity, especially in conversation. For it is easy to shew, in a short and lively manner, that such and such things are liable to objection, that this and another thing is of little weight in itself ; but impossible to shew, in like manner, the united force of the whole argument in one view.

In the last place, with regard to Christianity, it will be observed, that there is a middle, between a full satisfaction of the truth of it, and a satisfaction of the contrary. The middle state of mind between these two, consists in a serious apprehension, that it may be true, joined with doubt, whether it be so. And this, upon the

best judgment I am able to make, is as far towards speculative infidelity, as any sceptic can at all be supposed to go, who has had true Christianity, with the proper evidence of it, laid before him, and has in any tolerable measure considered them. For I would not be mistaken to comprehend all who have ever heard of it; because it seems evident, that in many countries called Christian, neither Christianity, nor its evidence, are fairly laid before men. And in places where both are, there appear to be some who have very little attended to either, and who reject Christianity with a scorn proportionate to their inattention; and yet are by no means without understanding in other matters. Now, it has been shewn, that a serious apprehension that Christianity may be true, lays persons under the strictest obligations of a serious regard to it, throughout the whole of their life; a regard, not the same exactly, but in many respects nearly the same, with what a full conviction of its truth would lay them under. *Lastly*, It will appear, that blasphemy and profaneness, I mean with regard to Christianity, are absolutely without excuse. For there is no temptation to it, but

from the wantonness of vanity or mirth ; and these, considering the infinite importance of the subject, are no such temptations as to afford any excuse for it. If this be a just account of things, and yet men can go on to vilify or disregard Christianity, which is to talk and act as if they had a demonstration of its falsehood ; there is no reason to think they would alter their behaviour to any purpose, though there were a demonstration of its truth.

APPENDIX.

I.

Intellectual Aid—(p. 14).

“A sceptic who yields to the powerful proofs of Revelation, will for a long time experience a most painful discordance between his judgment and the associations which unbelief has produced.

“When most earnest in the contemplation of Christian truth,—when endeavouring to bring home its comforts to the heart,—the imagination will suddenly revolt, and cast the whole at a sweep among the rejected notions.

“This is, indeed, a natural consequence of infidelity, which mere reasoning is not able to remove. Nothing *but humble prayer* can indeed obtain that faith which, when reason and sound judgment have *led* us to supernatural truth, gives to unseen things the body and substance of reality.”—*Blanco White's Evidence against Cath.* p. 18.

II.

Metaphysical Clearness of Christianity—(p. 15).

“Nor ought it to have escaped them,” (the French infidels of the Revolution), “that the Christian religion

contains within itself a key to those difficulties, doubts, and mysteries, by which the human mind is agitated so soon as it is raised beyond the mere objects which interest the senses.

“Milton has made the maze of metaphysics, and the bewildering state of mind which they engender, a part of the punishment of the lower regions.

“Christianity alone offers a clue to the labyrinth,—a solution of these melancholy and discouraging doubts; and, however its doctrines may be hard to unaided flesh and blood, yet, explaining as they do the system of the universe, which without them is so incomprehensible, and through their practical influence rendering men in all ages more worthy to act their part in the general plan, it seems wonderful,” &c. &c.—See the remainder of this admirable statement.—*Scott's Napoleon*, I. p. 55.

III.

Nature of the Christian Evidence—(p. 51).

“My mind found rest in that kind of conviction which belongs peculiarly to moral subjects, and seems to depend on an intuitive perception of the truth, through broken clouds of doubt, which is not in the power of mortal man completely to dispel. Let no one suppose that I allude to either mysterious or enthusiastic feelings; I speak of conviction prepared by examination. But any man, accustomed to observe the workings

of the mind, will agree, that conviction in intricate moral questions comes finally in the shape of internal feeling—a *perception* perfectly distinct from syllogistic reasoning, but which exerts the strongest power over our moral nature. Such *perception* of the truth is, indeed, the spring of our most important actions—the common bond of social life—the ground of retributive justice—the parent of all human laws.

“Yet it is inseparable from more or less doubt; for doubtless, conviction is only to be found about objects of sense, or those abstract creations of the mind,—pure number and dimension,—which employ the ingenuity of mathematicians.

“That assurance respecting things not seen, which the Scriptures call *Faith*, is a *supernatural* gift, which reasoning can never produce.

“This difference between the conviction resulting from the examination of the Christian evidences, and faith, in the scriptural sense of the word, appears to me of vital importance, and much to be attended to by such as having renounced the gospel, are yet disposed to give a candid hearing to its advocates. The power of the Christian evidences is that of leading any considerate mind, unobstructed by prejudice, to the records of Revelation, and making it ready to derive instruction from that source of supernatural truth. But it is the *Spirit of Truth* alone that can impart the internal conviction of *Faith*.”—*Blanco White*.

IV.

Evidence for Miracles—(p. 75).

“The short consideration which, independently of every other, convinces me that there is no solid foundation in Mr. Hume’s conclusion, is the following:—When a theorem is proposed to a mathematician, the first thing he does with it is, to try it upon a simple case, and if it produce a false result, he is sure that there must be some mistake in the demonstration. Now to proceed in this way with what may be called Mr. Hume’s theorem.—

“If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived,—if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call those men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposition or submit to be tied up to a gibbet,—if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposition in the case,—if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect,—if it was at last executed,—if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting to be racked, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account,—*still*

if Mr. Hume's rule be my *guide*, *I am not to believe them*. Now I undertake to say, that there exists not a sceptic in the whole world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity."

V.

Three Branches of the Christian Evidence.

IN the course of an able introductory essay to the Glasgow edition of Butler's Analogy, by Mr. Wilson, there occurs the following very luminous statement of the three main departments of the Christian Evidences.

Having stated this evidence to be of an external, internal and analogical character, he thus proceeds, forcibly delineating the separate and conjoint provinces of them all.

"*The external evidences* are those which should be first studied. Indeed they are the only ones that can be considered in the first instance as essential; because they undertake to shew the credentials of the messenger who professes to come with a revelation from heaven. Christianity claims a divine origin. I have therefore a right, indeed I am bound, soberly and impartially to enquire, what proofs she brings of this high claim. And when she refers me to the Holy Scriptures as containing all her records, I have a right to ask what evidence there is of the genuineness and authenticity

of these books, and what footing they place the religion upon, which they wish to inculcate on mankind. The answer to all these questions is found in what we call the External Evidences of Christianity. These shew the acknowledged facts on which the religion rests. They prove that the books were written by the persons whose names they bear, and do contain a true and credible history. They prove that the revelation itself was founded on unequivocal and numerous miracles; that it was accompanied (as it is accompanied still) with the distinct fulfilment of an amazing scheme of prophecy, embracing all the chief events of the world; and that it was propagated in the face of opposition and difficulty with a triumphant success, which nothing but the hand of God could have effected. These evidences also shew the positive good effects produced by this heavenly doctrine, and which are still being produced, in the melioration of society, and the advancement of human happiness and virtue in all the nations where it has been received. We have no right to go further than this in the first place. The moment the messenger is sufficiently proved to have divine credentials, we have but one duty left, that of receiving and obeying his message, that of reading and meditating on the revelation itself, in order to conform ourselves to it with devout and cheerful submission. We have no right at all to examine the nature of the

discoveries, or doctrines, or precepts of Christianity, with the view of determining whether they seem to us becoming the wisdom of God, and agreeable to the reason of man. It is proved that the revelation is from heaven. This is enough. The infinitely glorious Creator and Sovereign of the universe has full power to do what he will with his own, and to lay down laws for his creatures. We have no business, strictly speaking, with the contents and tenor of these laws, except to understand them and obey them.

“Great mischief has been done to the Christian cause by taking another method. Men have allowed themselves to be entangled with discussions on the possibility and credibility of a revelation being given to man, on the nature and tendency of the Christian doctrine, on the reasonableness of its particular injunctions,—questions every one of them out of place in examining the evidence of a divine religion. Let it fairly be made out to come from God, and it is enough. More than this is injurious. We are sure, indeed, that the contents of it must be most worthy of its perfect Author; but we are no adequate judges of what is worthy or what is not worthy of the infinite Being. We have no right to call the Almighty Creator to the bar of our feeble reason, and suspend obedience to his commands on the determination whether those commands are in our opinion just and good or not. To receive a revela-

tion on the ground of its proper credentials, and then to trace out with reverence the wisdom and goodness of its contents, is one thing; but to sit in judgment on those contents previously to an examination of its credentials, and in order to decide whether we shall receive the professed revelation or not, is quite another. We are competent to understand the simple and commanding language of the Almighty, attesting by miracles and prophecy, and the extraordinary propagation of the gospel and its visible good effects on mankind, the truth of a supernatural revelation; and yet are no competent judges whatever of the particular things the Almighty may see fit to communicate in that revelation. Evidences are level to a candid and fair understanding; divine doctrines may not be so. Evidences are addressed to man's reason, and warrant the modest exercise of it; doctrines are addressed to faith, and demand not discussion, but obedience.

“The danger of acting in the way which I am now venturing to condemn, is greater, because the door being once opened to such reasoning; it is quite certain that the minds of men will too often employ it amiss. The infidel is the person just the least capable to act aright in such a case. The pious well-trained judgment of a sincere Christian, might indeed form a better estimate of the internal character of a revelation from heaven: but the unsubdued mind of an unbeliever can

only come to a wrong decision upon it. He wants all the preparation necessary.

“But although the External proofs of Christianity are thus all that, in the first examination, is required, yet the *internal evidences* may afterwards be profitably, most profitably studied. Christianity shrinks from no scrutiny. She courts the light. When the outward credentials of the heavenly messenger have once been investigated, and the message been received on this its proper footing; then if it be asked, whether the contents of the revelation seem to confirm the proof of its divine original; whether the sincere believer will find them adapted to his wants; whether the morals inculcated, the end proposed, the means enjoined, are agreeable to man's best reason and the dictates of an enlightened understanding and conscience; whether the character of Christ be worthy of his religion; whether the influence of grace, said to accompany Christianity, may be obtained by prayer; whether the lives and deaths of Christians, as compared with those of professed Infidels, illustrate the excellency of their faith; whether, in short, the promises and blessings of Christianity are verified in those who make a trial of them, by submitting to the means appointed for their attainment: when such questions are put with candour, by those who have embraced Christianity, we answer them by referring to the Internal evidences of Revelation. These

Internal evidences are now our appropriate study. They shew us the adaptation of the religion to the situation and wants of man; the purity and sublimity of its doctrines and precepts; the character of its Founder; the sanctifying and consoling effects of the influence which accompanies it; the holy lives and happy deaths of its genuine followers; and the trial which every one may make of its promises and blessings, by fulfilling the terms on which they are proposed. Each of these topics admits of large illustration. The whole of the Internal evidences form an argument in favour of Christianity, as complete and satisfactory in its particular province, as the whole of the External. Indeed they are, in some respects, more persuasive, though they come after them and are secondary to them. The External evidences enforce conviction, the Internal induce to love. The External bring to light the potent remedy, the Internal apply it to the sufferer, and produce the actual cure. The first require an exercise of the understanding on plain facts stated, the second the submission of the affections to a benefit conferred. By the one we know religion to be true, by the other we feel it to be good. The External evidences awaken attention to a new doctrine, the Internal attract the heart to an incalculable blessing.

“Accordingly, no class of persons is excluded from that conviction of the truth of Christianity which springs

from a perception of its effects in themselves and others. The external evidences indeed are simple as they are majestic; but to the unpractised and uneducated mind, they necessarily lose much of their force. The great body of mankind must be indebted to their instructors in a large measure, for their faith in the historical evidences of religion; but they can feel it in its sacred fruits as keenly, and perhaps even more keenly, than any other description of persons. They are incapable of following a train of reasoning, or of judging of distant and remote facts; but they are quite capable of perceiving the blessedness of obeying Christianity, and of relying on its promises. Thus a source of faith is opened to them, abundant in proportion as they advance in piety and virtue. And though, as we have already observed, the unbeliever has no right to sit in judgment on the internal character of Christianity, but should, and must, in all reason, be contented at first with the proper external evidences that it really comes from God; yet when he has once received the Christian doctrine aright, and has begun to be moulded into its form, and take its impression, he will discover to his surprise new traces of a divine hand daily in all its parts, he will feel that it is salutary in all its doctrines and in all its precepts, in all its bearings and all its tendencies, in all its discoveries and declarations, in all its effects and fruits. Like the light of the sun,

APPENDIX.

can speak its author and source. The confirmation
 which the faith of the sincere believer thus receives
 is irrefragable. He has now entered the temple, of
 which he had been excluded from without, the pro-
 phet's temple. He has now partaken of
 the bread of life, and has heard the tidings and
 seen the face of the Physician, of whose
 power he has now experienced
 the efficacy. He has been convinced, and
 has received the unspeakable
 consolation which he has now received. He was
 brought to Christianity on the
 basis of the things taught by
 the attributes and
 but he has now a convic-
 tion conferred, of a kind
 more consoling in its effects.
 which could communicate, and which
 being known, from the nature of
 experience, yet, when once
 was away the heart.
 The evidence thus concurring to
 confirm the truth of the mes-
 sage, returning afterwards that
 the evidence and suitable
 to the sincere believer has
 been the firm grounds of

He is now prepared for considering, to the best advantage, the third branch of the evidences in favour of Christianity—that arising from *the analogy between this religion, and the constitution and course of nature*. This brings us to the immediate subject of Butler's Treatise, of which we have already given a review. We have no right, indeed, (for the idea is too important not to be repeated), to call for this species of proof, any more than we have a right to call, in the first instance, for an examination of the internal character of Christianity, or rather to call for it at all. All we have any fair right to ask for, is the credentials of the ambassador who professes to come to us in the name of our absent, though ever-present, Sovereign and Lord. It is perfectly true, that the analogy of nature, as formed by the same hand, will have traces of the same system and scheme as Christianity, just as it is true, that a revelation from heaven will possess every internal mark of holiness and goodness and truth; but we have no right to stop, and pretend to follow out all these matters, before we receive the Christian doctrine as divine. Christianity does not submit to plead at such a bar. The capacity of receiving advantage from these auxiliary evidences, depends on our first admitting, on the plain grounds of its miracles, and prophecies, and propagation, and mighty effects, the ^{truth} revelation by which these additional proofs

created and communicated, and without which they cannot be employed to any purpose.

“Still, after we have sincerely embraced the gospel, we may humbly inquire, whether the difficulties which are raised against it by unbelievers, or which occur to our own minds, may be relieved by an appeal to the works of God in nature, and his order and government therein. This is the argument from Analogy, which rises still a step above the two preceding branches of the subject, not as in itself necessary to the first reception of Christianity, but as furnishing the subsequent confirmation of it, and removing scruples and objections arising from the ignorance and presumption of man. It is, indeed, a glorious thing thus to discern the harmony between Christianity, the greatest of the Almighty's works, and all the other known productions of the same Divine architect. To see that the natural and moral government of God are parts of one stupendous whole, sums up, and finishes, and absolves the subject. Nothing more can be said. All is, what we might be sure it would be, complete and adequate. The force of External evidences is to compel assent; the effect of the Internal to produce love; the chief efficacy of the Analogical, to silence objections. By the first, a message is proved to come from heaven; by the second, the salutary effects of this message are felt and understood; by the third, it is shewn to be, in itself,

most agreeable to all the known dispensations of the divine Author. The first is the proper evidence which such a case indispensably demands; the next confirms, by actual experience, this satisfactory ground of belief; the last excludes all contradictory assertions, and creates a silence and repose of mind, when objections are urged by others, or arise in our own thoughts. External evidences, by their simple majesty, address the reason of mankind, and overwhelm objections and surmises; Internal, by the influences of truth on the heart, indispose men to listen to those objections; Analogical, by shewing that such objections lie equally against the constitution and course of nature, deprive them of all their force, and turn them into proofs of divine goodness and power.

“ In thus assigning to the three branches of evidence a particular position, we are far from insinuating that they may not be considered in a different order. We merely wish to claim for the external evidences the rank to which they are entitled in fair argument, and to protest against the additional and auxiliary evidences being improperly resorted to, in the first instance, to the neglect of the palpable credentials of the Christian message. To maintain this is a matter of real moment. It places the various branches of the inquiry in their true and natural light. Still we object not to any part of them being separately considered, according to the

disposition, age, talents, information, and circumstances of men. The Christian evidence in each division, and each subdivision of it, is so clear and convincing to a fair and sincere inquirer, as to admit of a distinct discussion and exhibition, if it be conducted with good faith. But if men wish to seize what seems to them a feeble part of the Internal or Analogical argument, and press this out of its place, disregarding the plain and direct proofs of Christianity from miracles, prophecy, &c. we then recal them to the consideration of the real state of the argument. We tell them they are no adequate judges of what a divine revelation should contain. We appeal to the proper and unanswerable proofs of a divine religion, in the extraordinary manifestations of Almighty God in its favour. And we bid them to postpone the examination of the subsidiary evidences, till they have weighed the primary ones, and received the religion which they attest. Thus to a serious candid mind, we are willing to open at once any part of the wide subject of the evidences of Christianity; whilst to a captious and unreasonable inquirer, we propose the strict rules of debate, and demand the orderly examination of the credentials of the religion.

“ If, however, after all, men will unreasonably demand an exposition of the internal character of Christianity in the first place, or will dwell on objections raised against its particular constitution, we descend on the

ground they have chosen, and without relinquishing our right to assume a higher position and to insist only on the direct proofs of it, we meet them where they stand, and shew them the inward excellency of our religion from the Internal evidences, or the weakness and inconclusiveness of their objections from the Analogical. Thus Christianity stoops, so far as it can, to the fancies of men, and argues with them on their own principles. This is particularly the case with the evidence from analogy.

“It is indeed one of the most valuable branches of the whole Christian argument, because objections are the ground commonly taken by unbelievers. For weak and inconclusive as these objections are, they are sufficient, when listened to, to steel the heart against the force of truth, and bar up the first entrance to the Christian doctrine. The young and inexperienced are thus gradually seduced and hardened. It is not that men have found out that the External evidences of Christianity are insufficient, for they have never studied them—it is not that they have discovered the fallacy of the Internal evidences, for they have never been in a situation to judge of them. But they have heard bold things flippantly said against Christianity: things which they were not sufficiently informed on the subject to answer; these have sunk into their memories, and acquired force by lapse of time; and thus their

minds became gradually tainted and poisoned. Their passions, impatient of the restraints of Christianity, aided the delusion. Their pride of intellect, ambitious of forsaking the common track, listened to the flattering tale. The opinions and example of others, as little competent to judge as themselves, attracted them onwards. Ridicule, unanswerable ridicule, came in to their overthrow. The love of novelty was not without its force. They had no inclination to the patient inquiry which such a subject as religion demands; whereas an objection was seized at once. Thus, insensibly, the impressions of a pious education were effaced, and the unhappy youth entered on the mazes of infidelity, and came, at last, to scoff at the very religion which he once revered, if he did not obey.

“ Here, then, the argument from Analogy may be of the greatest service. We insist not with such a youth, on an examination of the External evidences of religion, to which we see he would not attend, and we come at once to his objections. We shew him, in the manner of the preceding treatise, that we may well expect to find the same sort of character in a revelation, proceeding from the Author of nature, as is found in the constitution and order of nature itself; that our ignorance, with respect to natural things, is such, that we cannot go on a single step, except as facts and experiments lead us by the hand; and, that as this ignorance is the

proper answer to presumptions and difficulties, derived from our opinions of things beforehand, so is this much more the case in religion, where we find only the same kind of difficulties which meet us perpetually in the works of the same hand in the course of nature. So that, in short, he that rejects Christianity, on account of these difficulties, may, for the very same reason, deny the world to have been formed by an intelligent Creator. Thus all objections against the Scriptures, drawn from what is similar or analogous in the order of the world, which is acknowledged by the objector himself to proceed from an Almighty Governor, are satisfactorily silenced; and the mind, freed from harassing and frivolous objections, is at liberty to weigh impartially the direct proof of Christianity, and then to seek the best confirmation of a wavering faith, in its salutary effects in pardoning guilt, tranquillizing conscience, subduing pride, regulating the affections and appetites, and changing the whole character from that of a discontented, captious, selfish creature, to that of a patient, docile, thankful, benevolent one.

“Thus all the several branches of the Evidences of Christianity are ultimately studied, though not in the order which the strict rules of the case would lay down. The great object is gained if the unbeliever is convinced; but if, on the contrary, he refuses to listen to our argument from analogy, or professes himself dis-

satisfied with it, we are still at liberty to remind him, that the only proofs which he can claim in the first instance, are the direct and proper credentials of miracles and prophecy, and other external evidences; and that his paramount duty is to submit to the revelation thus attested, and not yield to objections and difficulties resting on mere conceptions and opinions.

“But the use and importance of the argument from analogy may be frequently observed in the case of the sincere Christian. How often is the thoughtful believer harassed by objections! The best men are still weak and defective; and notwithstanding the clearest deductions of reason, and the avowed subjection of the heart to the gospel, doubts, and embarrassments, and apprehensions, will haunt the mind. There are few who have not felt this. The imagination roves on forbidden topics—thoughts the most unwelcome intrude—arguments fail to satisfy—exploded objections recur. Especially if circumstances require a Christian to treat with infidels, and examine and refute their arguments, the infirmity of his faith will sometimes be an occasion of surprise and distress to him. In such seasons, no source of relief is more plenteous than that springing from the clear and striking similarity between the objections raised against revelation, and those which may be raised against the government and order of God in natural providence. When the External and Internal

evidences of Christianity seem cold, and ineffective, and barren, the Analogical precisely meet his feelings. The full and adequate repose which they inspire, is a calm after a storm. The relief is more sensible from being unexpected. For, somehow or other, the mind, at times, appears quite hedged in with fears and speculations. The state of misery in which the world lies—the prevalence of moral evil—the immense majority of the human race sunk in pagan ignorance—the trials of good men—the prosperity of the wicked—the slow progress of truth and reason; these, and a thousand like matters, perplex, too frequently, the benevolent and reflecting mind of the Christian. He is quite astonished that an all-wise and all-gracious Creator should leave a revelation with so little efficacy attending it. He thinks that he can never obtain satisfaction upon these questions. He has forgotten the arguments which formerly silenced his scruples, and his faith is ready to fail him. The analogical argument then occurs to his distracted thoughts—he reads it as if he had never read it before—it seems new, forcible, conclusive—his proud reasonings sink—faith resumes her sway—humility acknowledges the ignorance and littleness of man, before the incomprehensible plans of the infinite God—his state of probation and discipline, forces itself upon his notice—the traces of the same divine Governor, in the natural and moral world, are again seen and recognized—and



the satisfaction he thus regains is more than can be expressed. In proportion as the difficulties appear insuperable, is the removal of them consoling and vivifying.

“ There is this further to be noticed, as to the importance of the argument from analogy, that it is capable of indefinite ramification. The fruitfulness of it is such, that each Christian, throughout the whole course of life, may multiply his observation without exhausting the inquiry. There is an inherent freshness and life in it, which makes it always new and interesting.

“ Indeed, we must observe, before we quit this topic, that the *variety* of the Christian argument generally, is one striking confirmation of its truth. The evidences for revelation may be truly said to be diversified, and extensive beyond any thing that could have been conceived, we do not say, on a like subject, but on any subject whatever. If a man were allowed to point out beforehand, the proofs of a divine religion to be addressed to a reasonable and accountable being, he could not name any different in kind from those which we possess. For what could a man demand, but either the conspicuous display of a clearly miraculous power in attestation of it, or the incontrovertible fulfilment of prophecy—or the triumphant and supernatural spread of the doctrine itself—or the visible and mighty effects on all who receive it? And where the revelation is admitted and obeyed, what internal confirmation of its

truth could he desire, beyond the adaptation of it to the state and wants of man—the purity and sublimity of its doctrines and precepts—the untainted benevolence of its Founder—the attendant influence of grace—and the actual accomplishment of its promises to all who apply duly for them? And if objections be afterwards raised against this scheme, what could he wish further, than to see them extinguished by considerations derived from the ignorance of man, and the incomprehensibility of God? In this diversity of proof all the attributes of the Almighty are pledged, as it were, to the sincere believer. The miracles give him the pledge of the sovereign power of God—the prophecies, of his omniscience—the supernatural propagation of the gospel, of his supreme providence—the effects produced, of his fidelity—the adaptation to the state of man, of his wisdom—the purity of the doctrine and morals, of his holiness—the character of Christ, of his condescension—the accompanying influence, of his grace and goodness—the fulfilment of the promises, of his veracity. Thus the evidences of Christianity have an impression of the divine glory irradiating them.*

* We are indebted for some thoughts in this part of the Essay, to Mr. Davidson's admirable Warburtonian Lectures—a work of deep research, and full of fine reflections; especially on the structure of prophecy.

it will speak its author and source. The confirmation which the faith of the sincere believer thus receives is indescribable. He has now entered the temple, of which he had before surveyed, from without, the proportions and magnificence. He has now partaken of the feast, of which he had before heard the tidings and listened to the invitation. He has now experienced the skill and tenderness of the Physician, of whose fame and powers he had before been convinced only by testimony. He has now shared the unspeakable gift which had before been offered to him. He was well persuaded, on first embracing Christianity on its due external authority, that every thing taught by it would be found most agreeable to the attributes and glory of its divine Author. But he has now a conviction resulting from the benefits conferred, of a kind higher in its degree, and more consoling in its effects, than any external proof could communicate, and which, though incapable of being known, from the nature of the case, previously to experience, yet, when once known, sways and bears away the heart.

“The two branches of evidence thus concurring to one result—the External proving the truth of the messenger, and the internal confirming afterwards that truth by an experience of the excellency and suitability of the message itself—the Christian believer has a continually growing conviction of the firm grounds of his faith.

He is now prepared for considering, to the best advantage, the third branch of the evidences in favour of Christianity—that arising from *the analogy between this religion, and the constitution and course of nature*. This brings us to the immediate subject of Butler's Treatise, of which we have already given a review. We have no right, indeed, (for the idea is too important not to be repeated), to call for this species of proof, any more than we have a right to call, in the first instance, for an examination of the internal character of Christianity, or rather to call for it at all. All we have any fair right to ask for, is the credentials of the ambassador who professes to come to us in the name of our absent, though ever-present, Sovereign and Lord. It is perfectly true, that the analogy of nature, as formed by the same hand, will have traces of the same system and scheme as Christianity, just as it is true, that a revelation from heaven will possess every internal mark of holiness and goodness and truth ; but we have no right to stop, and pretend to follow out all these matters, before we receive the Christian doctrine as divine. Christianity does not submit to plead at such a bar. The capacity of receiving advantage from these auxiliary evidences, depends on our first admitting, on the plain grounds of its miracles, and prophecies, and propagation, and mighty effects, the truth of the revelation by which these additional proofs are to be

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most agreeable to all the known dispensations of the divine Author. The first is the proper evidence which such a case indispensably demands; the next confirms, by actual experience, this satisfactory ground of belief; the last excludes all contradictory assertions, and creates a silence and repose of mind, when objections are urged by others, or arise in our own thoughts. External evidences, by their simple majesty, address the reason of mankind, and overwhelm objections and surmises; Internal, by the influences of truth on the heart, indispose men to listen to those objections; Analogical, by shewing that such objections lie equally against the constitution and course of nature, deprive them of all their force, and turn them into proofs of divine goodness and power.

“ In thus assigning to the three branches of evidence a particular position, we are far from insinuating that they may not be considered in a different order. We merely wish to claim for the external evidences the rank to which they are entitled in fair argument, and to protest against the additional and auxiliary evidences being improperly resorted to, in the first instance, to the neglect of the palpable credentials of the Christian message. To maintain this is a matter of real moment. It places the various branches of the inquiry in their true and natural light. Still we object not to any part of them being separately considered, according to the

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“ If, however, after all, men will unreasonably demand an exposition of the internal character of Christianity in the first place, or will dwell on objections raised against its particular constitution, we descend on the

ground they have chosen, and without relinquishing our right to assume a higher position and to insist only on the direct proofs of it, we meet them where they stand, and shew them the inward excellency of our religion from the Internal evidences, or the weakness and inconclusiveness of their objections from the Analogical. Thus Christianity stoops, so far as it can, to the fancies of men, and argues with them on their own principles. This is particularly the case with the evidence from analogy.

“It is indeed one of the most valuable branches of the whole Christian argument, because objections are the ground commonly taken by unbelievers. For weak and inconclusive as these objections are, they are sufficient, when listened to, to steel the heart against the force of truth, and bar up the first entrance to the Christian doctrine. The young and inexperienced are thus gradually seduced and hardened. It is not that men have found out that the External evidences of Christianity are insufficient, for they have never studied them—it is not that they have discovered the fallacy of the Internal evidences, for they have never been in a situation to judge of them. But they have heard bold things flippantly said against Christianity: things which they were not sufficiently informed on the subject to answer; these have sunk into their memories, and acquired force by lapse of time; and thus their

minds became gradually tainted and poisoned. Their passions, impatient of the restraints of Christianity, aided the delusion. Their pride of intellect, ambitious of forsaking the common track, listened to the flattering tale. The opinions and example of others, as little competent to judge as themselves, attracted them onwards. Ridicule, unanswerable ridicule, came in to their overthrow. The love of novelty was not without its force. They had no inclination to the patient inquiry which such a subject as religion demands; whereas an objection was seized at once. Thus, insensibly, the impressions of a pious education were effaced, and the unhappy youth entered on the mazes of infidelity, and came, at last, to scoff at the very religion which he once revered, if he did not obey.

“ Here, then, the argument from Analogy may be of the greatest service. We insist not with such a youth, on an examination of the External evidences of religion, to which we see he would not attend, and we come at once to his objections. We shew him, in the manner of the preceding treatise, that we may well expect to find the same sort of character in a revelation, proceeding from the Author of nature, as is found in the constitution and order of nature itself; that our ignorance, with respect to natural things, is such, that we cannot go on a single step, except as facts and experiments lead us by the hand; and, that as this ignorance is the

proper answer to presumptions and difficulties, derived from our opinions of things beforehand, so is this much more the case in religion, where we find only the same kind of difficulties which meet us perpetually in the works of the same hand in the course of nature. So that, in short, he that rejects Christianity, on account of these difficulties, may, for the very same reason, deny the world to have been formed by an intelligent Creator. Thus all objections against the Scriptures, drawn from what is similar or analogous in the order of the world, which is acknowledged by the objector himself to proceed from an Almighty Governor, are satisfactorily silenced; and the mind, freed from harassing and frivolous objections, is at liberty to weigh impartially the direct proof of Christianity, and then to seek the best confirmation of a wavering faith, in its salutary effects in pardoning guilt, tranquillizing conscience, subduing pride, regulating the affections and appetites, and changing the whole character from that of a discontented, captious, selfish creature, to that of a patient, docile, thankful, benevolent one.

“ Thus all the several branches of the Evidences of Christianity are ultimately studied, though not in the order which the strict rules of the case would lay down. The great object is gained if the unbeliever is convinced; but if, on the contrary, he refuses to listen to our argument from analogy, or professes himself dis-

satisfied with it, we are still at liberty to remind him, that the only proofs which he can claim in the first instance, are the direct and proper credentials of miracles and prophecy, and other external evidences; and that his paramount duty is to submit to the revelation thus attested, and not yield to objections and difficulties resting on mere conceptions and opinions.

“ But the use and importance of the argument from analogy may be frequently observed in the case of the sincere Christian. How often is the thoughtful believer harassed by objections! The best men are still weak and defective; and notwithstanding the clearest deductions of reason, and the avowed subjection of the heart to the gospel, doubts, and embarrassments, and apprehensions, will haunt the mind. There are few who have not felt this. The imagination roves on forbidden topics—thoughts the most unwelcome intrude—arguments fail to satisfy—exploded objections recur. Especially if circumstances require a Christian to treat with infidels, and examine and refute their arguments, the infirmity of his faith will sometimes be an occasion of surprise and distress to him. In such seasons, no source of relief is more plenteous than that springing from the clear and striking similarity between the objections raised against revelation, and those which may be raised against the government and order of God in natural providence. When the External and Internal

evidences of Christianity seem cold, and ineffective, and barren, the Analogical precisely meet his feelings. The full and adequate repose which they inspire, is a calm after a storm. The relief is more sensible from being unexpected. For, somehow or other, the mind, at times, appears quite hedged in with fears and speculations. The state of misery in which the world lies—the prevalence of moral evil—the immense majority of the human race sunk in pagan ignorance—the trials of good men—the prosperity of the wicked—the slow progress of truth and reason; these, and a thousand like matters, perplex, too frequently, the benevolent and reflecting mind of the Christian. He is quite astonished that an all-wise and all-gracious Creator should leave a revelation with so little efficacy attending it. He thinks that he can never obtain satisfaction upon these questions. He has forgotten the arguments which formerly silenced his scruples, and his faith is ready to fail him. The analogical argument then occurs to his distracted thoughts—he reads it as if he had never read it before—it seems new, forcible, conclusive—his proud reasonings sink—faith resumes her sway—humility acknowledges the ignorance and littleness of man, before the incomprehensible plans of the infinite God—his state of probation and discipline, forces itself upon his notice—the traces of the same divine Governor, in the natural and moral world, are again seen and recognized—and



the satisfaction he thus regains is more than can be expressed. In proportion as the difficulties appear insuperable, is the removal of them consoling and vivifying.

“ There is this further to be noticed, as to the importance of the argument from analogy, that it is capable of indefinite ramification. The fruitfulness of it is such, that each Christian, throughout the whole course of life, may multiply his observation without exhausting the inquiry. There is an inherent freshness and life in it, which makes it always new and interesting.

“ Indeed, we must observe, before we quit this topic, that the *variety* of the Christian argument generally, is one striking confirmation of its truth. The evidences for revelation may be truly said to be diversified, and extensive beyond any thing that could have been conceived, we do not say, on a like subject, but on any subject whatever. If a man were allowed to point out beforehand, the proofs of a divine religion to be addressed to a reasonable and accountable being, he could not name any different in kind from those which we possess. For what could a man demand, but either the conspicuous display of a clearly miraculous power in attestation of it, or the incontrovertible fulfilment of prophecy—or the triumphant and supernatural spread of the doctrine itself—or the visible and mighty effects on all who receive it? And where the revelation is admitted and obeyed, what internal confirmation of its

truth could he desire, beyond the adaptation of it to the state and wants of man—the purity and sublimity of its doctrines and precepts—the untainted benevolence of its Founder—the attendant influence of grace—and the actual accomplishment of its promises to all who apply duly for them? And if objections be afterwards raised against this scheme, what could he wish further, than to see them extinguished by considerations derived from the ignorance of man, and the incomprehensibility of God? In this diversity of proof all the attributes of the Almighty are pledged, as it were, to the sincere believer. The miracles give him the pledge of the sovereign power of God—the prophecies, of his omniscience—the supernatural propagation of the gospel, of his supreme providence—the effects produced, of his fidelity—the adaptation to the state of man, of his wisdom—the purity of the doctrine and morals, of his holiness—the character of Christ, of his condescension—the accompanying influence, of his grace and goodness—the fulfilment of the promises, of his veracity. Thus the evidences of Christianity have an impression of the divine glory irradiating them.*

* We are indebted for some thoughts in this part of the Essay, to Mr. Davidson's admirable Warburtonian Lectures—a work of deep research, and full of fine reflections; especially on the structure of prophecy.

“But it is not merely the diversity of these topics, but the *dissimilarity* of them from each other, which gives them their incomparable weight. They are not all of a kind. The impostor who could be imagined to feign one branch of them, would be incapacitated by that very attempt from feigning the rest. They would each demand a separate scheme, distinct powers, a new reach of intellect, different combinations. The independence of these different evidences upon each other, indescribably augments their force. In fact, the annals of mankind never exhibit such a religion as Christianity surrounded with her credentials, nor any thing like it. The systems of Heathenism and Mahomedanism reflect a glory on revelation by the contrast which they exhibit in these respects, as well as in every other.

“And yet the *simplicity* of these different evidences of our religion is as remarkable as their number and diversity. For they are level to every understanding. They address themselves to the faculty of judgment with which we are endowed. The reader of history; the student of nature, the scholar, the contemplative philosopher, the uneducated inquirer, the candid mind of every class, may find obvious and satisfactory proofs adapted to his habits and capacities. If there is no bad faith, every one that investigates this great question will find the satisfaction he seeks for.

“ We only observe, further, that the proper force and strength of these evidences, lie in the UNION of all the parts of the argument. This Bishop Butler has pointed out, chiefly in respect of the analogical argument; but it is important to be applied to the entire subject. One point may more forcibly strike the conviction of one inquirer, and another point of another; a separate argument may be weakly stated by the Christian advocate; mistakes may be made in deducing a particular historical proof, or alleging a particular fact. But the cause of Christianity does not rest on any one division of the subject, but on the whole. Each separate branch is, indeed, firm enough to sustain the entire edifice; but we are not allowed to let it rest there. We must remind the sincere inquirer, that it is the combined effect of the various topics which he is called on to observe. And if this be done, we fear not to assert, that no such inquirer shall fail of all the satisfaction which a moral certainty can produce. The infidel attacks Christianity generally on some single isolated point of evidence; and if he can contrive to obscure the brightness of this, triumphs as if he had proved the religion to be fictitious. And not only so, but if he can only raise a doubt about the truth, of this single, and perhaps subordinate point, he turns this doubt into what he calls a positive argument against Christianity. But

this is unfair and disingenuous. Christianity reposes on the entire structure of her evidences—a structure which has never, as yet, been fairly assailed, much less weakened or destroyed; and which rears its front in undiminished stability and glory, mocking at its feeble and discomfited opponents.”

